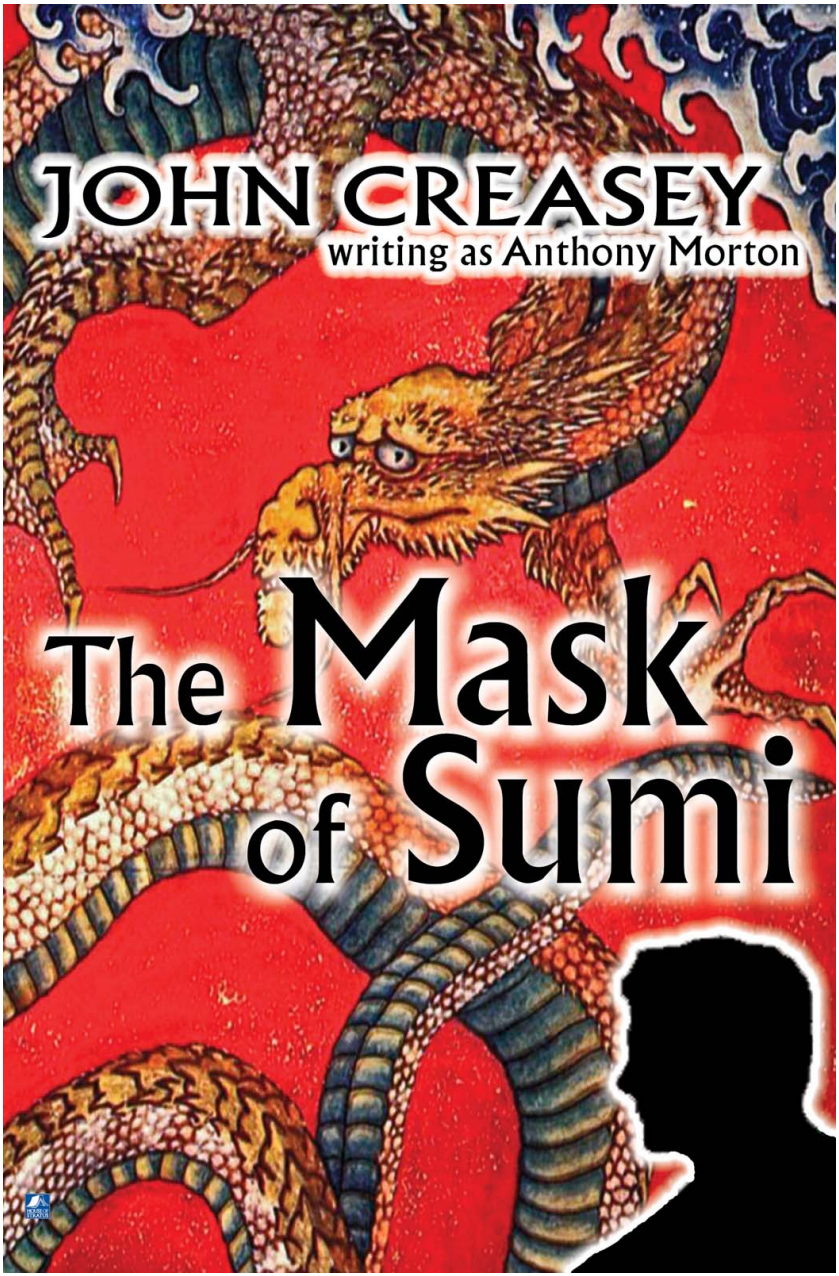

JOHN CREASEY
writing as Anthony Morton
The Mask of Sumi

Copyright & Information

The Mask of Sumi

First published in 1964
© John Creasey Literary Management Ltd.; House of Stratus 1964-2013

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise), without the prior permission of the publisher. Any person who does any unauthorised act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

The right of John Creasey to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted.

This edition published in 2013 by House of Stratus, an imprint of Stratus Books Ltd., Lisandra House, Fore Street, Looe, Cornwall, PL13 1AD, UK.

Typeset by House of Stratus.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library and the Library of Congress.

This is a fictional work and all characters are drawn from the author's imagination.
Any resemblance or similarities to persons either living or dead are entirely coincidental.

www.houseofstratus.com

About the Author

John Creasey – Master Storyteller - was born in Surrey, England in 1908 into a poor family in which there were nine children, John Creasey grew up to be a true master story teller and international sensation. His more than 600 crime, mystery and thriller titles have now sold 80 million copies in 25 languages. These include many popular series such as *Gideon of Scotland Yard, The Toff, Dr Palfrey and The Baron*.

Creasey wrote under many pseudonyms, explaining that booksellers had complained he totally dominated the 'C' section in stores. They included:

> *Gordon Ashe, M E Cooke, Norman Deane, Robert Caine Frazer, Patrick Gill, Michael Halliday, Charles Hogarth, Brian Hope, Colin Hughes, Kyle Hunt, Abel Mann, Peter Manton, J J Marric, Richard Martin, Rodney Mattheson, Anthony Morton and Jeremy York.*

Never one to sit still, Creasey had a strong social conscience, and stood for Parliament several times, along with founding the *One Party Alliance* which promoted the idea of government by a coalition of the best minds from across the political spectrum.

He also founded the *British Crime Writers' Association*, which to this day celebrates outstanding crime writing. *The Mystery Writers of America* bestowed upon him the *Edgar Award* for best novel and then in 1969 the ultimate *Grand Master Award*. John Creasey's stories are as compelling today as ever.

The Baron On Board

The fabulous Sumi crown jewels are up for sale – including the Mask of Sumi, a beautiful yet strangely repellent object. When the jewels are stolen, and taken on board ship by a woman, the Baron follows, only to find himself involved in a murder and in the midst of some very messy Oriental politics.

Chapter One

EXPECTED VISITOR

It was said that sooner or later the four corners of the world met at Quinns, in Hart Row, Mayfair; and in a way this was true. Certainly the dealers in precious stones, in *objets d'art* and in miniature paintings came to Quinns whenever they were in London, as they would go to Sotheby's or Christies. They went for the same reason, too; at Quinns they might find precisely the thing they wanted to buy or sell.

They came to England by the normal ways; more by air than by sea, more by sea than by train, more by train than by road. Many of them were well-known figures in their own restricted but exclusive world, the world of precious and of beautiful things, some created out of man's mind, some dug out of the dark earth and polished and cut and diligently worked upon by man to bring out their true beauty.

The owner of Quinns was as well known as the sixteenth-century shop itself. The experts, be they dealers or collectors, sellers or buyers, came to him as to an equal. Some said that John Mannering was the world's greatest expert on antique jewellery, but Mannering disclaimed it.

"I know a little about a lot," he would say. "The real experts are the specialists."

"Such as?"

"Men and women who've dealt in the same kind of valuables all their lives," Mannering would reply. "Often they're comparatively little known. Most of them make their living out of their special knowledge."

On a day in July Mannering was in the small office at the back of the narrow shop, expecting such an expert – Nikko Toji, from Bangkok. He did not know Toji well, but had met him in West Berlin and in New York, but never in London. Toji's reputation was beyond reproach. His special subject was Oriental jewellery, but like Mannering he always disclaimed being the greatest connoisseur in the world.

"In Oriental, Japanese and Chinese jewellery, yes, perhaps, I know some things. Of European or Middle Eastern jewellery I know practically nothing."

In fact, of course, he knew a great deal.

He had cabled Mannering to say that he would like to see him in London this morning, and that a letter was in the post. Mannering had received it only a few hours ago. In excellent English, it said:

> "I have the honour to present myself as the agent for Prince Asri of Sumi. Prince Asri is the owner of the Asri Dynasty jewels and for good reasons wishes to find a buyer for them. He would prefer to sell to one person or group, not to break up the Collection. He also wishes the matter to be kept secret and confidential until at

> least one year after the negotiations are complete. For these reasons I am about to request your assistance, Mr. Mannering, in finding a suitable buyer, and your assistance alone. I will cable you the date and time of my arrival as soon as I am able positively to say which flight I shall catch.
>
> With my respects and good wishes,
> Yours very sincerely,
> Nikko Toji."

The cable, pinned to the letter, said that Toji would arrive at eleven o'clock today. It was now nearly twelve.

Mannering had two books open on his desk, *Oriental Crown Jewels* and *Oriental Dynasties*. The Asri Dynasty was an old one; the family of the Princes of Sumi for over five hundred years.

There was a note:

> "The last ruling member of the dynasty, Prince Asram, died in 1961. Sumi is now a republic with a democratically-elected president."

There was no mention of Prince Asri.

There was a brief mention of the Crown Jewels of Sumi in the other book, but very little in the way of details.

Mannering tried to make sure that he jumped to no conclusions, but he found himself wondering whether the democratically-elected President of Sumi knew about the proposal to sell the jewels, or whether the Prince required that year of silence so that it would be too late to do anything if the Government did find out.

Mannering glanced at his watch; it was exactly twelve o'clock. Almost on the instant, there was a tap at the door.

"Come in." He began to get up, expecting Toji. Instead his manager, Josh Larraby, came just inside.

"Mr. Toji is very late, sir."

"His aeroplane is probably delayed," Mannering said.

"I have just telephoned the airport and was told that the aircraft from Singapore came in at nine o'clock – on schedule," Larraby said. "Mr. Toji was on board. He had some little difficulty with Customs but was allowed through at nine-thirty. I talked to Inspector Justin, who said that he will try to find out what happened afterwards."

"I hope he isn't lost in London," remarked Mannering lightly. "Was he alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"If he hasn't arrived by one o'clock call Justin again, will you?" As soon as Larraby went out Mannering picked up the telephone and dialled the number of the British Museum. He talked to one of the librarians, a man

whom he knew well.

"The Asri Dynasty and the Sumi nation – I have a note of your requirements, Mr. Mannering. I will look through the index and take out any book which might be of interest. Will you call for them yourself?"

"I'm more likely to send Larraby," Mannering said.

Almost as soon as he replaced the receiver the telephone bell rang. He hoped it was Toji; instead it was an enquiry from a London dealer about a Genoese silver table which stood in the window of Quinns, unpriced because it was virtually beyond price.

Mannering forgot Nikko Toji in his negotiations for a sum for the table which would satisfy its owner.

It was a quarter to one when the telephone rang again.

"Mannering," said Mannering automatically.

"London Airport Police calling. Hold on, please." Mannering waited for a few seconds, then heard the deep voice of Inspector Justin.

"Mr. Mannering."

"Hallo, Inspector."

"I've some news about your man from Thailand."

"That's good."

"He left here in a private car, a large Austin," Justin said. "It was driven by a young woman."

"Do you know anything about her?"

"Nothing at all," Justin replied. "The attendant at the car park thought she was a wow. Blonde, bouncy, and beautiful, he says. They headed for London in a thick stream of traffic."

"Did anyone follow them out of the main gates?"

Justin chuckled.

"I had a feeling you'd ask that. My man says not."

"Thanks," said Mannering, and asked quickly: "Do you know what caused the delay in Customs?"

"Toji had some jewellery with him for exhibition. He signed all the necessary forms and guarantees, and was allowed to leave. They were old jewels – antique is the word."

"Thanks very much," said Mannering, giving no trace of his growing anxiety "Do you know the name of the Customs officer who dealt with him?"

"A man named Perks."

"Thanks."

"Any time," said Justin.

Mannering rang off and made some pencilled notes to remind him of the salient points of that report. He had no idea whom Toji had met, and was surprised that anyone had been at the airport, but he tried to thrust his disquiet to the back of his mind. The man from Bangkok was shrewd and knowledgeable, and could surely take care of himself. He was also courtesy itself, Mannering knew; at the root of that disquiet was the fact that Toji had not sent a message to apologise for his lateness.

Mannering sent a junior assistant for a sandwich and some coffee, then asked Larraby to pick up the books from the British Museum.

By half past two Larraby was back with two thick volumes.

"Has there been any message from Mr. Toji, sir?"

"Nothing," Mannering answered. "I'm really puzzled now."

He was also really worried.

It would be simple to telephone Scotland Yard and to report his disquiet, but it might create a great deal of embarrassment for Toji. Mannering read the letter again. "*And your assistance alone*" was quite positive, but the blonde who had met Toji was not necessarily connected with the reason for his visit to London.

There was one small paragraph in one of the books from the British Museum about the Crown Jewels of Sumi which added to Mannering's scanty knowledge of them.

"… are said to be of great value but no comprehensive account of them is available and no detailed list. The most valuable piece is said to be the Mask of Sumi, the equivalent of a crown in other countries, which is placed over the face of the new ruling Prince. It is said the Prince must not be seen in public without this mask for the first twelve weeks of his reign, or he will forfeit his right of accession and his next of kin (male) will replace him."

The extract was from a book published in 1907, and there were no later references.

Mannering looked at his watch. It was nearly three o'clock. It was inconceivable that Toji would stay away for so long and not send a message. He must begin to make inquiries.

He rang for Larraby, who came in at once.

"Josh, find out if Toji has been to any other dealer, will you?"

"Yes, sir, I will. But it isn't at all likely."

"None of this is likely," Mannering said drily.

Larraby went out, and almost at once Mannering's telephone bell rang. By now he was so preoccupied that he did not want to concentrate on other business, and snatched up the receiver.

"Mannering." He was almost brusque.

"John," said Lorna, his wife.

Over the years, Lorna's voice had wooed him out of great anxieties, dark moods of depression, and moments of dangerous indecision. He forgot Toji at least for the moment.

"Hallo, darling!"

"John, a queer thing just happened."

"How queer?"

"A man telephoned and asked if I was expecting a visit from a Thai – a man from Bangkok – named Toji, Nikko Toji."

"Oh," said Mannering heavily. "You weren't but I was." He shut his mind to urgent questions, and went on: "What else did he say?"

"He said that this Toji was dying," Lorna announced with a catch in her

voice. “He also said he was asking for me all the time.”

“Did he say where Toji is?” asked Mannering tensely.

“In the Compton Hotel, Bayswater,” Lorna told him.

The Compton Hotel was a house in a terrace of tall Georgian houses in a turning off the Bayswater Road. It had been newly painted black and white, and the high gloss paint had an artificial appearance. Black letters on massive round pillars announced the name. Cars were close-parked outside. The front door was wide open, and as Mannering paid off his taxi and went in he saw a man and a woman in the dark hall.

They turned round as he entered.

“Are you Mr. Mannering?”

“Yes. How is Mr. Toji?”

“A doctor and a policeman are with him,” the man said. “Will you go straight up, please? It’s the second door on the right at the front landing.”

Mannering hardly noticed the couple, except that the man was grey-haired and plump and the woman tall and thin. He ran up the stairs. The door on the right was open. Beyond was a big, spacious room with huge windows. Against a wall was a double bed, and in the middle of the bed was Nikko Toji.

He was obviously at death’s door.

His eyes were half-closed, his mouth open and slack. His jet-black hair made his pallor like wax. His hands were outside the sheet, waxen-white too, except for the nails, which shone with natural-coloured varnish.

On either side of the bed was a man, one elderly and grey-haired, the other young, red-faced, alert-looking.

“Mr. Mannering?” this man asked.

“Yes.”

“I am Detective Officer Druitt, sir, Divisional Headquarters. Is it true that you know this man?”

Mannering looked intently into that almost lifeless face. After a pause, he said: “Yes, I know him slightly. He had an appointment with me at eleven o’clock this morning, at my office.”

“That was the time he arrived,” said the detective. “He told the proprietor that he was to meet you here.”

The tone of the man’s voice was heavy with suspicion.

Chapter Two

NIKKO TOJI

"What happened to him?" Mannering asked quietly as he looked at the mask-like face of the old man.

"As far as I can judge, morphine poisoning," the grey-haired man declared. "Certainly one of the narcotics."

"This is Dr. Rush," said Druitt. "This man came straight up to this room which you booked," put in the detective.

"*I* booked?" Mannering echoed.

"It was booked in the name of Mannering."

"Not by me," Mannering said.

Now his mind was racing over the possibilities, none of them pleasant. Some things were now quite obvious. The blonde had met Toji at the airport and pretended that Mannering had sent her. They had come straight here, Toji expecting to see Mannering, and had been taken straight up to a room reserved in his name. It was too easy to see what conclusions one could reach from those facts.

"If you didn't book the room, why did you come here?" the detective asked.

It would be simple to argue and refuse to answer: it would also waste time.

"Someone telephoned my wife to say I was wanted here," said Mannering. "Has everything been done to help Toji?"

"Everything," said the doctor.

"An ambulance is on the way," put in Druitt. "Once we realised what was wrong we didn't lose any time."

"What are his chances?" Mannering wanted to know that desperately.

"In my view he hasn't a chance," Dr. Rush declared flatly.

The words were hardly out of his mouth before the roar of an engine sounded outside in the street. It stopped. Doors slammed and footsteps clattered. Soon two ambulance men carrying a stretcher came into the room. Mannering watched as they lifted Toji on to the stretcher and carried him out. He felt a great sense of shock; in some ways this was unbelievable. But his mind and his eyes were working. He saw Toji's single lightweight suitcase in a corner, a trilby hat, a furled umbrella, a folded raincoat.

Detective Officer Druitt said: "Are you *the* Mr. Mannering?"

"I'm Mannering of Quinns," Mannering said.

"That's what I mean, sir. Did you expect the Jap here?"

The use of "Jap" irritated Mannering but he knew that he mustn't show it. He told his story briskly and comprehensibly, seeing belief replacing the doubt in the detective's eyes. He finished: "He isn't Japanese, he's a Thai, a very respected man in Bangkok and among dealers everywhere."

"Thank you, sir. You think this blonde woman met Mr. Toji at the airport and told him you'd sent her, do you, sir?"

"I think it's possible."

"As she already booked a room for you here, she must have been pretty sure that the visitor had come to see you, mustn't she? Have you told anyone?"

"Only my office manager." Mannering had kept Toji's confidence so faithfully that he had not even told Lorna. "No one discovered that Toji was coming here from my end." As he spoke he realised that he would have to make a formal statement soon, probably at the Yard. That would be better than telling this man everything now, and repeating it. "I'll be glad to make a full statement when it can be taken down properly," he went on. "Just now we ought to look about the room."

"A murder squad is on the way from the Yard," the detective said. "We'll have to leave everything until then."

"Of course," Mannering said, as if he accepted that without question. "I'll be back in a few minutes." He hurried out, guessing that Druitt would stay in the room until his colleagues arrived. Dr. Rush was in a small room off the hall, talking to the tall woman and the plump grey-haired man.

"No one is going to blame you," he was saying almost testily. "I doubt if your hotel will be named. Let me know if there's anything I can do. Elsie, if you take my advice you'll keep busy about the house. If you sit around you'll just brood over it." He turned away, and looked startled at sight of Mannering. "Ah, Mr. Mannering. You've met Mr. and Mrs. Smith, no doubt. Most distressing experience for them." He nodded, and bustled off.

The man and woman turned to Mannering.

"Please don't worry my wife with any more questions," Smith pleaded. "She's dreadfully upset as it is."

"Who took the telephone booking in the name of Mannering?" inquired Mannering.

"I did," the woman answered.

"Elsie, there's no need—"

"Was the woman already staying here?" Mannering ignored the plump man's objections.

"Yes, she came last night," the woman replied. "She registered under the name of Yates, and said she had some business in London this morning. It's terrible. *Ter*rible."

"Did she have any luggage?" asked Mannering.

"Just one case," Smith answered. "But please—"

"The police will ask all these questions, and it should be a help to go over them now," Mannering said persuasively. He did not think questions would really harm Mrs. Smith. They might even save her from a bout of hysterics. "Was anyone else with her?"

"Mr. Mannering, we run a respectable hotel!"

"I'm sure you do," said Mannering hastily. "But did she leave by herself? Apparently she drove to London Airport to meet Mr. Toji."

"She said she had hired a drive-yourself car," answered Smith. "She went off in a taxi at eight o'clock, and came back with the man in an Austin. The man said he was to wait in Mr. Mannering's room, and as it was empty I didn't see any harm in that."

"Did you see Miss Yates leave?"

"No."

"Has she paid her bill?"

"She paid in advance for bed and breakfast," the proprietress answered. "She seemed charming and honest, I can't believe she had anything to do with this awful thing."

"I wonder if I could have a look in her room," Mannering said.

The hotel-owner and his wife were still so upset and preoccupied that they raised no objection, and led Mannering up to the second floor. As they reached it, two cars and a swarm of men arrived downstairs.

"That will be the rest of the police," Smith said. "I'd better go and see them. Elsie—"

"Why don't I look after your wife," suggested Mannering, "while you have a word with the police?"

"Thank you, thank you." Smith hurried downstairs. His wife, looking very pale, opened the door of a small room in which a narrow window overlooked the back garden and the backs of similar houses in the next street. The bed was made, the room had the unlived-in look of most hotel rooms.

"When did you make up the room?" asked Mannering.

"Soon after Miss Yates left. After all, I didn't know—"

Mannering interrupted: "Was there anything left about?"

"No, she had packed her case – it was standing just there." Mrs. Smith pointed to the window. "I made the room up myself, so I know what I'm talking about, I really do. Staff is so short, and in any case they *never* do their work properly."

"Did you empty the waste-paper basket?" asked Mannering.

"There wasn't really anything in it, except last night's newspapers."

"Do you still have them?" asked Mannering.

"I always keep newspapers, you never know when they'll come in useful. But why—"

Mrs. Smith broke off as footsteps sounded on the stairs. Mannering had a quick look round but saw nothing which might interest or help him, until he looked behind the old-fashioned walnut dressing-table, with its wing mirrors. Curled up on the floor was a cylinder of paper. He could not get at it easily, but could see a shiny surface on the outside and some printing which showed through.

The woman hurried towards the door. Mannering squeezed behind the dressing-table and picked up the roll of paper. As he did so, Druitt's voice sounded: "I understand that the young woman stayed on this floor, Mrs. Smith."

"Yes she did. She—"

The hotel proprietress put on her more nervous, strident voice. She broke off as Mannering held the little cylinder in his left hand.

Druitt and another plainclothes man came in.

"What are you doing here?" Druitt asked sharply.

"Looking around," Mannering said.

"I thought I told—"

"I don't think I like being told anything," Mannering interrupted coldly. "If I'm wanted, I'll be at Quinns. Thank you, Mrs. Smith."

He nodded curtly to the detective and went out. He half expected to be stopped, but Druitt let him go. A policeman on duty at the front door actually saluted.

Mannering turned towards the Bayswater Road. He took the roll of paper out of his pocket. It was a gummed label which had curled up and come off a piece of baggage. Square and yellow with black printing, it ran:

B.I.C: British India Steamship Navigation Company

There was no name of vessel, nothing else to help, but if this had come off the blonde Miss Yates's baggage, it could mean a great deal. There was no certainty that it had, of course, but it was very new-looking. He folded it in half, carefully, and placed it in his wallet, then looked about for a taxi. One came along as he reached the corner.

"Scotland Yard," he ordered.

"Right, sir."

Mannering sat back, with a picture of the little man from Bangkok vivid in his mind's eye. He had absorbed the shock, but the real sadness of the situation was beginning to affect him. He could recall Toji's bright, eager face, his thoroughness, the way his eyes lit up whenever he was discussing Oriental jewels. Toji had been a dedicated man – and he had come to England with such implicit trust in Mannering.

Was he dead by now? Or had he a chance to live?

Was it conceivable that he had taken the Mask of Sumi with him to the Compton Hotel?

Mannering found questions streaming through his mind one after the other. The most insistent was: *how had anyone in London learned what Toji had brought with him and known it had been worth stealing?*

Quite suddenly it dawned on Mannering that he wasn't using logic and reasoning; he was jumping to conclusions. There was as yet no proof that robbery had been the motive. There could have been other motives for his murder – and the word *murder* wasn't yet justified. It was even conceivable that Toji had killed himself.

"Nonsense!" Mannering said aloud. "He wouldn't have come to England to commit *hari-kiri.*"

The taxi turned into the Embankment gates of New Scotland Yard, and stopped at the foot of the steps leading up to the C.I.D. building. Mannering paid off the driver, walked up the steps, and was welcomed by a sergeant in

the reception hall.

"Haven't seen you for a long time, Mr. Mannering. Hope you're well, sir."

"Very well, thanks. And you?"

"Can't grumble, sir. Mr. Bristow said to go straight to his office."

Mannering was startled, but covered his surprise well. He knew the way up to the next floor and to the office of Superintendent William Bristow, old friend, old adversary, and the Yard's expert on precious stones. A sergeant was coming out of Bristow's office as Mannering arrived.

"Morning, Mr. Mannering!" he welcomed heartily.

"Good morning."

The sergeant held the door open. Mannering went in to a large, airy, sunny office with a view of the Thames which was bright in the summer sun. Bristow was now grey, grey-haired, grey-moustached (except in the middle where it was stained with nicotine) and grey-clad. His hair was cut short, and his moustache was clipped. He was spruced to the point of immaculacy, and sported a white gardenia.

"Hallo, John." He stood up and stretched his hand across his desk. "I thought it wouldn't be long before you came to make your peace."

"Has there been a war?" inquired Mannering.

"The Division thinks you probably engineered the Toji affair yourself for some nefarious purpose known only to dealers in precious stones," Bristow said. "Sit down." He pushed cigarettes across the desk. "Do you know why Toji killed himself?"

"*What?*"

"So you did think it was murder," Bristow said smugly. "You can't be right every time, can you?"

"Are you sure he killed himself?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Oral dose of morphia, in tablet form. He had a small phial of the tablets in his pocket. His fingerprints are on the phial, a fragment even on one of the other tablets. He swallowed them about one o'clock today, if Dr. Rush is right. And he's dead now."

Although he had expected it, news of Toji's death was a shock. Mannering stood up and crossed to the window, really upset. Then he went back to the desk.

"Did you know him well?" asked Bristow, in a much more sympathetic tone.

"Well enough."

"Why did he come to England?"

"Shall we have a stenographer in?" suggested Mannering. "Then I can make a real job of the whole story."

"Of course," Bristow said.

Mannering dictated for over five minutes to a woman stenographer. Bristow made no comment until she had left, but studied the letter and cable from Toji, which Mannering had brought with him.

“Someone knew what he had brought here,” Bristow said at last. “There can’t be any doubt about that.”

“What did he have with him?” asked Mannering.

“Don’t you know?”

“No.”

Bristow said: “The Mask of Sumi.”

“I can’t believe he’d bring it.”

“He did. Customs officers saw and examined it. Toji actually declared it on his declaration form as a jewelled mask of great antique value known as the Mask of Sumi.”

“How do you know it was genuine?” asked Mannering huskily.

“I don’t think you need have any doubts about that,” Bristow retorted. “Toji told the Customs officer that he had brought the mask to prove the genuineness of the Collection he had to offer. He said that he was coming to see you. I’ve since checked with the London Airport police and your friend Justin. The woman Yates told Toji she was your personal assistant, and obviously convinced him, because he went off with her without any hesitation.”

“I wish I knew how she made him believe I would be at the Compton Hotel to meet him,” Mannering said. “Toji wasn’t a gullible old man. She must have had a very good reason.”

“I suppose so.”

“I’d also like to know who telephoned Lorna to say Toji was at the hotel,” said Mannering.

“I can answer that one,” Bristow said. “It was Smith, at the hotel. He found Toji semi-conscious and asking for ‘Mis’ Mannering’. A slurred Mister can sound like Mrs.”

“How did he get my flat number?” asked Mannering. “Mannering isn’t an unusual name.”

“Toji had it written on a slip of paper. Here it is.” Bristow passed over a sheet of airmail paper which had two telephone numbers on it – Quinns as well as that of the Chelsea flat. “Smith tried the first number and it was engaged. So he tried the other. John, someone has stolen that mask, and it’s in England somewhere. Have you any idea where?”

Chapter Three

ON BOARD?

"No," Mannering answered. "I've no idea where the mask is or who has taken it. I'm not really convinced it was the real one, and I'm not convinced that Toji killed himself."

"I'm satisfied that he did," Bristow declared. "If you want to waste time on some cock-eyed theory there's nothing I can do about it. How much was the mask worth?"

"Didn't Customs agree a value?"

"Intrinsically, twenty-five thousand pounds," said Bristow. "But to a collector – twice as much, say?"

"At least," Mannering agreed. "Probably nearer a hundred thousand." He slid his hand inside his pocket, feeling his wallet, thinking of that B.I. label. This was a moment of real decision – whether to make inquiries himself or leave it to the police. If the label had come off a bag belonging to the blonde who had fooled Toji it might be of vital importance. The police might be able to find out and quickly, for the woman called Yates would have left other prints and the police would have photographs of these by now. It might only need a moment's comparison.

If the prints on the label were not the blonde's, no harm would be done. If they were then the police would have to be told at once and there would be little scope for private investigation.

Bristow's telephone bell rang.

"Excuse me." He lifted the receiver. "Yes, sir," he said, so this was the Assistant Commissioner. "He's with me now – yes, I'm sure he will." Bristow rang off, pondered as if not sure of Mannering's reaction, and then said quietly: "The Assistant Commissioner is worried about international complications over the death of Toji. He wants you to have a word with the Thai Consul. For some odd reason they seem to think highly of you."

Mannering smiled, feeling a deep sense of relief.

"Why don't you take a leaf out of their book, Bill?"

"I'll go and get the Consul," Bristow said.

He went out, leaving Mannering alone in the office with all the files and the reports on the case.

Mannering knew Bristow too well to believe that he would be slipshod or careless in any way. This looked almost as if he *wanted* Mannering to have access to those files. Mannering stretched across the desk, turned the file round, and flipped it open. Below some written notes were photographs of fingerprints, two of them marked *female* and one *male.* There were several copies of each. Mannering slipped one print of each into his pocket, as he scanned Bristow's handwritten notes.

These were in the form of questions.

1. Did Toji have more than the mask with him?
2. Did M. tell anyone Toji was coming?
3. If not, how did anyone know enough to make the interception at the airport possible?
4. Is Mannering keeping anything back?
5. Total value (*a*) mask (*b*) all jewels?
6. Where to get history of jewels?

Beneath this list was a kind of *postscript:*

M. might have told a collector or some other dealer.

Well, he hadn't.

As he finished reading Mannering heard footsteps outside, much heavier than Bristow usually made; Bristow was giving warning of his approach. Mannering closed the file and twisted it round. The door opened and Bristow ushered in an Oriental who stood barely as high as his shoulder. He was dressed immaculately in dark grey. He smiled. He shook hands. He said he had heard of Mr. Mannering and also that Mr. Toji had planned to come to see Mr. Mannering. He, the Thai Consul, had known Mr. Toji well. He, the Consul, as well as Mr. Toji and all Thais of any standing, felt the loss of such a venerable relic as the Mask of Sumi a great blow to the integrity and to the reputation of Thailand. If Mr. Mannering could do anything at all to assist the police to recover this priceless treasure, which had been entrusted to Mr. Toji by Prince Asri, then he, the Consul, would be forever grateful. Mr. Mannering might not be aware that Prince Asri had in fact been acting on behalf of the Sumi Government, who had wished the sale of the crown jewels to be kept secret. Otherwise it would be suggested that the Government was in a desperately bad economic plight. In fact, the Consul understood, the sale was to remove all danger of an attempt to restore the Sumi Dynasty.

"Was that why Prince Asri was used as the agent?" asked Mannering.

"The Prince is well known for his democratic principles," the Consul said. "He could safely be entrusted with such a delicate mission. However, his wife, Princess Kana, persuaded him to work through Mr. Toji, whose reputation for integrity is rivalled only by his knowledge. The Princess had worked with Mr. Toji before and knew how fully he could be trusted. Now my Government feels that it owes the Government of Sumi a great debt. We wish to repay it by finding the crown jewels."

Mannering said sharply: "Don't you mean the Mask of Sumi?"

The Consul said gravely: "It is now known that all the jewels are missing, not only the mask. You see how great is our moral obligation?"

After a long pause, Mannering said: "I do indeed."

"And you will help?"

"In every way I can," promised Mannering.

"I am most grateful." The Consul shook hands again, bowed, and allowed Bristow to usher him into the arms of a detective inspector, who took him away.

Mannering looked at Bristow and said flatly: "Did you know about the rest of the jewels?"

"Only from the Consulate," said Bristow. "That's what makes the problem so acute. It's a lot of money for a tiny independent country, and it could make the difference between economic prosperity and disaster. You know what the Consul thinks, don't you?"

"What?"

"That Toji knew where the jewels were, and told you before he killed himself out of shame at being robbed of the mask."

"It's possible," Mannering conceded. "But it isn't right, Bill. I know exactly what I've told you and no more. Have you any clues at all?"

"No."

"No known fingerprints?"

"Nothing. The blonde who called herself Yates has vanished. She might now be a red-head, a brunette, or an ash-blonde, and be anywhere in London. Have you any ideas?" Bristow asked, in turn.

"Not yet," Mannering said, grimly.

That was really the moment when he decided to keep the matter of the British India Line label to himself. Bristow hadn't specifically warned him not to investigate on his own. There was little doubt that the Yard man expected him to. Probably Bristow felt that it would be virtually impossible for Mannering to resist the temptation of going after the missing jewels himself. Certainly he would know that if any of them came on the market, Mannering was likely to find out, for the trade had a remarkable information system.

"If you hear anything at all about it, let me know at once, won't you?" Bristow said. "Whether you hear of anyone who wants to sell it, or to buy it?"

"I will," promised Mannering.

He left the Yard about half past four, and took a taxi straight to Quinns. Two people were standing admiring the beautiful wrought silver table in the window. They gazed with rapt attention, without saying a word. Mannering went in. Larraby stood at one side of the long, narrow shop, with a brilliant light shining on a piece of early Babylonian corsage jewellery. A bald-headed man was studying this through a watchmaker's glass.

There were several messages in the office, but none about the Thai affair. One note was from the dealer who wanted the Genoese table.

"I will meet your price subject to a discount of five per cent."

Mannering scribbled over this: "Settle for three and three quarters per cent" and put the papers aside. He picked up *The Times* and scanned the *Shipping arrivals and departures* column.

He read:

S.S. East Africa, London to Durban, 12 noon.

He ran his finger down the list of "British" in the telephone directory, found British India Steam Navigation Company Limited, and dialled the number at its offices in Aldgate. A girl answered.

"I think the *East Africa Star* sailed on time, sir. Hold on and I'll make sure."

Mannering held on for a few seconds until a man spoke.

"What was your enquiry about the *East Africa Star,* sir?"

"Did she leave on time?"

"She left at one o'clock."

"Do you know if any intending passengers missed the ship?"

"No, sir, not to my knowledge. I think I would have known by now if anyone had."

"Where's the first port of call?" asked Mannering.

"Gibraltar, at ten o'clock on Monday – four days from now."

"Thank you very much," Mannering said.

He rang off and took out the B.I. label, fingering it very carefully. He put a book along one side and a heavy ruler on the other to hold it straight, and then took a tin of powder from the bottom drawer of his desk. It was a grey dusting powder. He sprinkled some of this over the yellow label, and blew gently. Most of the powder disappeared, but in several places it clung, until well-defined fingerprints showed up. Mannering took out a magnifying glass, and the photographs of the prints filched from Bristow's office.

His heart began to beat very fast.

The loops and whorls of two sets of prints were identical. The two marked *female* were absolutely identical with two of the prints on the label.

"That might mean that our blonde is on that boat," Mannering said aloud. "I wish I knew how to be sure." He lifted the telephone again and dialled the British India Line.

"I want to find out if a friend of mine caught the *East Africa Star* today," he said. "Is it possible to see a copy of the sailing list?"

"If you care to give us the name of the passenger and which class, sir, I can tell you."

"Yates, Miss," replied Mannering promptly. "And I imagine first class."

There was a pause.

"No, sir, we've no passenger named Yates about. There's a Mr. and Mrs. Gates and three children, and Sir Archibald Bates, but no Yates. Are you sure it was the *East Africa Star?"*

"Yes," said Mannering. "Thank you for your trouble."

He was annoyed with himself because he had given the passenger's name. This affair had caught him on the wrong foot. He pondered for five minutes, then called the *Daily Globe* and asked for the Reporters' Room.

"Mr. Chittering, please."

"Hold on." There was a clatter of typewriters and a chatter of voices which seemed to last for a long time before a man said briskly: "Who is it?"

"Mannering," announced Mannering.

"*What?*" Chittering's tone changed. "The great John himself?"

"Just John," said Mannering drily.

"What can I do for you?" Chittering, an able man, was invariably affable with Mannering.

"Get me a list of passengers on the *East Africa Star*, which left London for Durban this morning."

"That's easy," said Chittering. "A couple of sheiks from the Aden Protectorate were on board. There was quite a party. What do you want the list for?"

"I'm looking for a certain party."

"I don't mind a joke but I can't stand a pun," said Chittering. "I'll get the list for you and put it in the post."

"Can I collect it?" asked Mannering.

"So it's urgent," said Chittering slyly. "Who are you looking for?"

"A blonde beauty."

"You'll have me believing you in a minute. Is there a story in this?"

"There could be," said Mannering. "Who covered the sheiks for you?"

"Reggie Frost and Dottie Mills," said Chittering. "Reggie's gone up to Scotland but Dottie is around. Shall I ask her to bring you the passenger list? Then she can worm the whole story out of you."

"If she'll come to my flat about half past six she can worm a drink out of me," Mannering said. "Thanks, Chitty." He rang off, and pondered for a few minutes; he would have to have some kind of story for Dottie Mills, preferably one which would make her remember any blonde whom she might have noticed on board. As Bristow had said, the blonde who had lured Toji to his death might have dyed her hair by now; but Dottie had a remarkable nose for news, and would have noticed anyone the slightest degree out of the ordinary.

He sent for Larraby, and told him what had happened. Then: "The police want to know if there could have been a leakage of information about what Toji had with him. A leakage from us, I mean."

"I don't think there is the slightest possibility," Larraby said. He looked rather like the grandfather of all cherubs, although just now there was nothing seraphic about his expression; obviously he was troubled. "Certainly I told no one."

"Could anyone have overheard us talking?"

"Do you mean among the staff?"

"Anyone at all."

"I feel quite sure that the staff is utterly discreet," said Larraby. "Paterson is quite new, of course, but I should think irreproachable. The story is bound to appear in the evening newspapers," went on Larraby. "I should be able to find out from their comments if any of the staff had any idea that Toji was on his way to see us."

“Let me know as soon as you can,” urged Mannering. “And try to find out from the Far Eastern News Agency what you can about the Asri Dynasty and the political situation in Sumi.”

“Very good,” said Larraby.

Mannering signed some letters, telephoned to close the deal for the Genoese table, and stepped to the door as his telephone bell rang. Almost simultaneously the office door opened on Larraby. Mannering went to the telephone, watching his man, who carried a copy of the *Evening News*. Larraby pointed to a headline which Mannering could not read, and shook his head. Mannering nodded, and lifted the telephone.

“Mannering.”

“John, has your inquiry for the passenger list anything to do with the Thai jeweller who was found dead in a Bayswater hotel this morning?” demanded Chittering.

“Not a thing,” Mannering said promptly. “There might be a woman on board the *East Africa Star* who brought in some diamonds when she shouldn’t. I’m a long way from certain and if a whisper of it gets into the *Globe* you could have a big action for libel on your hands. But if Dottie will help me, then I’ll do what I can for you both if anything breaks.”

“You can’t say fairer than that,” conceded Chittering. “Thanks, John.”

Mannering felt that he had lied in a good cause, and now knew exactly what line to take with the woman reporter. He tidied his desk, left Larraby to lock up, and went to a small car park where he kept his Bentley. He drove through rush-hour traffic and reached Chelsea, where he lived, just before six o’clock. His flat was at the top of one of three old buildings, the only ones left out of what had once been a handsome terrace. New flats in small, rectangular blocks were on either side of the three houses. He had room to park his car, went in and waited for the small lift which had been installed fairly recently. As it crawled upwards he thought he heard a woman call out. As it stopped and the gates opened automatically, Lorna – his wife – appeared.

“John, hurry!” she exclaimed. “There’s a call for you from Bangkok.”

Chapter Four

CALL FOR HELP

Mannering squeezed Lorna's hand as he passed her and went into the flat. The door of his study was wide open, and he saw the telephone receiver off its cradle. He picked it up quickly.

"Hallo."

"Mr. John Mannering?"

"Yes, speaking."

"I have a call for you from Bangkok, Thailand. Hold on, please."

"I'll hold on."

The usual buzzings on the line followed. Lorna came in and sat on a pouffe near Mannering. She moved with unusual grace for a tall woman, was still raven-haired, had a near-perfect complexion. In repose her heavy eyebrows gave her an almost sullen look, but any kind of animation drove that away. Now her clear grey eyes were bright, and her lips were parted so that he could just glimpse her teeth.

"*Is it about Nikko Toji*?"

"*I expect so*."

"*Is everything all right*?"

"*It will be*."

"Mr. Mannering?" A woman's voice sounded carrying a lilt which certainly wasn't English.

"Speaking."

"One moment, please. Miss Toji wishes to speak to you."

Toji's daughter, Mannering mouthed to Lorna. He glanced at her. She stood up and went to a carved Jacobean court cupboard where they kept the drinks. She took out whisky, a syphon of soda, and some gin.

"Mr. Mannering, this is Pearl Toji," a woman said in good English which had a noticeable American accent. "Will you please tell me, did you see my father before he died?"

Mannering wished he could see the girl's face, or that there was some way in which he could make her feel his sympathy. This young woman was so far away, and it was difficult to talk naturally over the telephone anyhow.

"I saw him for a few moments," he said.

"Did he speak to you, please?" She was very eager.

"No, I'm sorry to say. He had no chance to."

Disappointment replaced the eagerness in Pearl Toji's voice. There was a pause before she said: "You mean you had no word with him?"

"None at all."

"Mr. Mannering, he told me everything that he was going to talk to you about. Will you see me if I come straight to London?"

"Of course," promised Mannering.

"Thank you. I will be there the day after tomorrow," she said simply. "There is one other thing now."

"If there is anything at all I can do to help—" began Mannering.

"There is one thing," Pearl Toji repeated almost fiercely. "You can believe that my father did not kill himself. I do not care what anyone says – the police, the Consul, the newspapers – anyone. I want you to find out who killed him, Mr. Mannering. That above all other things."

Very slowly and deliberately, Mannering said: "If I can, I certainly will."

"Thank you," said the dead man's daughter. "Thank you very much. My father had the highest regard and trust for you. Always," she added, and her voice seemed to fade. "Goodbye."

The line went dead.

Mannering seemed to hear her voice still in his ears. He replaced the receiver slowly, only just aware of Lorna moving about. He was in a different world – a world filled with that Thai girl's voice.

Lorna handed him a glass, without a word. He looked at it blankly at first, and then took it. He sipped, and the taste of the whisky seemed to release him from the spell which the girl had woven.

Mechanically, he said: "Cheers."

"Is she coming here?" asked Lorna.

"Yes."

"What does she want you to do?"

Mannering said: "Find her father's murderer." He tossed the drink down, put the glass on a table, and went to Lorna and slid his arms round her. "Hallo, my sweet!" He kissed her and held her very tight for a moment or two, then set her away from him. He became brisk and alert. "Dottie Mills of the *Globe* will be here any minute, and she drinks like a fish. Do you want to put any make-up on?"

"Not for Dottie," Lorna said. "Why is she coming?"

"Stand by and you'll hear it all," Mannering said. "Stall her for five minutes if she comes before I'm ready, will you?"

He went into the bathroom, washed briskly in cold water, then went into the long and lovely drawing-room. The décor was pale blue and grey, and the room was filled with Regency pieces each selected with an expert's eye. Over the mantelpiece was a head and shoulders portrait of a cavalier. People coming in to this room for the first time were always startled, for the handsome face, the curve of the lips, the very air of the cavalier were the image of Mannering, as if it were a portrait of Mannering in costume.

That was exactly what it was, a portrait painted by Lorna, who was one of the best known portrait painters in England.

Mannering sat back in an armchair, his eyes closed, trying to think clearly and to decide exactly what he wanted to find out from Dottie Mills, and also trying to decide whether to tell her the truth or not. In some ways that might pay dividends, but if there was even a rumour in the Press that he thought that someone involved in the theft was on board the *East Africa Star* it could be disastrous. He decided to keep up the pretence that he was

interested in a diamond smuggler.

The front door bell rang.

"Why, Mrs. Mannering, how delightful to see you again. We haven't met since your simply superb exhibition at the Tate, have we? Absolutely divine, and if you don't mind me saying so I think your work is actually getting *better*. How do you improve on the best, though? Is your husband in? He told Chitty that he thinks he is on the trail of some wicked smugglers. I do hope he is!"

She went on and on until her voice was cut off by the closing of a door.

Mannering gave her five minutes alone with Lorna, then went into the study.

No one quite knew very much about Dottie Mills. She jumped up from an oak settle as Mannering entered; it was like a spring uncoiling after severe contraction. She was immensely tall, angular, bony, and breezy. She must be fifty but wore a girlish short-skirted dress which fitted her so tightly that every movement seemed a shimmy. Her little breasts poked out like two tennis balls, making her almost ludicrous. She had a big mouth, big teeth, and a hooked nose.

And she gushed.

She took Mannering's hand and held it tightly in cold, bony fingers.

"Mr. Mannering, how *wonderful* you look." She was taller than he, but bent her knees so that she could stare up, as if adoringly, into his face. "And how delightful Mrs. Mannering is, as always. I really cannot tell you how grateful—"

She went on like that for several minutes, between sips of her drink. The glass empty, she gushed.

"I told dear Chitty I was *sure* you wouldn't ask me here unless it was *very* confidential."

"It certainly is," said Mannering.

"Any minute now you're going to say 'off the record', you naughty man!"

"Off the record only for a short while," Mannering assured her. "I know I can rely on you."

"I should be utterly desolated if I thought you thought you couldn't!" Dottie drew nearer, fluttered her fingers at Lorna, to draw her closer, and asked conspiratorially: "*Was it the blonde?*"

"Blonde?" ejaculated Mannering.

"The blonde beauty who came on board late."

"Was there one?"

"*Are* you after a blonde, Mr. Mannering?"

"I thought she would have dyed her hair before coming aboard."

"Oh, my dear man!" Dottie glanced at Lorna as if to ask: "How naïve can the male sex be?" She leaned even closer and he could feel her breath on his cheek. "She *was* dyed."

"Oh," said Mannering.

"About five feet seven, *beautifully* sexed, so vitally statisticated to coin a word, and so *very* anxious to find out whether she had been followed. Is that

the woman you're after, Mr. Mannering?"

"It sounds very much like her," Mannering felt excitement racing.

"From the moment dear Chitty told me you were interested I found myself thinking of Melody Yesling," declared Dottie. She thrust two bony fingers down the V of her dress and drew out several folded sheets of paper. As she unrolled these she went on conspiratorially: "Here is the passenger list. Melody Yesling booked only yesterday, and she was very lucky to get a single cabin. Isn't that interesting? Above everything else she *had* to have a cabin to herself, and by great and good fortune the Maharajah of Somewhere cancelled at the last moment, some marital problem or other, and so she took his, at *great* expense.

"Could she possibly be a kind of *Mata Hari* of the smuggling world, Mr. Mannering? Do say she could."

Dottie Mills had gone, gushing to the last, outwardly convinced that she was on the inside of a story of diamond smuggling, and outwardly completely assured that in due time Mannering would make sure she had a scoop. Mannering and Lorna were thoughtful over dinner, while Mannering filled in the details. They had coffee in the drawing-room, where Lorna took up her favourite position on the pouffe, and sat close to Mannering's side.

"There isn't any certainty that the blonde took the mask on board, is there?" Lorna asked.

"None at all. But presumably she would want it out of the country as soon as possible."

"Yes, I suppose so. Where does the *East Africa Star* call?"

"First stop, Gibraltar," Mannering answered. "After that Port Said, Aden, Mombasa, Dar es Salaam, and places south."

"So she could take the mask off at any one of those ports."

"Yes," agreed Mannering, grimly.

Lorna said: "Darling, why has this come to mean so much to you?"

"Are you sure it has?"

"I know the look in your eyes," Lorna said. "Is it because of Nikko Toji?"

"It's because Toji believed the blonde was my messenger, and he died because of his trust in me." That was the simple truth and his depth of feeling robbed the words of any pomposity.

Lorna was looking straight up into his eyes.

"It's a waste of time telling you that it isn't your fault by any stretch of the imagination," she said. "Oh, how I love you!"

The passion in her voice took him completely by surprise. Suddenly, they were hugging each other, the years rolling back to the early days of their life together. Mannering knew exactly what had passed through Lorna's mind; a flash of the past, when an incident like that of Toji's death would lead him, Mannering, out of a happy and secure daily life into a danger which could bring death.

Lorna freed herself.

"I know I'm a goose," she said. "No, don't say anything." She pressed her

hands against her thick black hair. “Do you really think that Dottie’s Melody Yesling is the blonde of the taxi?”

“Don’t you think it’s likely?”

“I suppose so,” Lorna admitted. Dottie had described how the woman had arrived only half-an-hour before the ship had sailed, carrying one suitcase. Dottie ‘had happened’ to notice her; Dottie’s nose was even longer metaphorically than it was physically, and she missed nothing. Her description of the way the last-minute passenger had watched the gangway and the quayside had been very vivid. “Yes,” went on Lorna, “I expect it was the same girl. What are you going to do? You know the obvious thing, don’t you?”

“Tell Bristow.”

“Yes.”

“I’ve left it late,” said Mannering.

“There’s still time to tell him. The police could have Melody Yesling questioned at Gibraltar.”

“There’s always a chance she was eloping, and afraid her father was on her trail,” said Mannering lightly. “I don’t want to send Bristow haring after the wrong woman. Besides—”

Lorna drew in her breath. “Yes?”

“Bristow thinks that Toji committed suicide,” Mannering said. “I can’t really believe it, and his own daughter doesn’t. I think we ought to wait until Pearl Toji arrives. The *East Africa Star* won’t be at Gibraltar until Tuesday. There’ll be plenty of time to fly to the Rock and check up on Melody Yesling after I’ve talked to Pearl. There’s one peculiarity,” he added. “The blonde gave her name as Yates, and there aren’t many people whose name begins with Y. I wonder how she signed that register?”

He rang the Compton Hotel, and spoke to the grey-haired Smith.

“She signed as Miss Mary Yates,” Smith insisted. “I assure you I had no idea at all that it wasn’t her real name. The initials were on her travelling case – I actually saw that myself as it stood on the dressing-table.”

“That clinches it,” said Mannering to Lorna, when he rang off. “The label wasn’t stuck on properly and fell off behind the dressing-table. Mary Yates and Melody Yesling are one and the same person.”

“Do you think she took the Mask of Sumi with her?”

“It’s the most likely reason for her sailing,” Mannering said. “The real question is whether she knows where the other jewels are.”

Chapter Five

ALIAS MARY YATES

Melody Yesling, *alias* Mary Yates, sat in her cabin on board the S.S. *East Africa Star* as it neared Gibraltar on the following Tuesday, and stared at the incredible beauty of the mask on the dressing-table. The beauty was beyond question, yet there was something quite repellent about it.

It was a mask and yet there was something almost human in the set of the features.

Or something sub-human.

She did not touch it, just stared as if fascinated. It was in the shape of a round human face, with sockets for the eyes and a slash for the mouth; there was no opening for the nose, only a kind of protuberance in which the nose would fit.

The mouth opening was lined, at both top and bottom lip, with rubies. They glistened in the dressing-table light like blood. The eye-sockets were encrusted with emeralds, and in the centre of the brow was a big diamond, shimmering and glistening. The ears were made of some semi-precious stone which Melody did not recognise. Little clusters of rubies and sapphires covered the cheeks, and on the chin, like a clipped beard, was gold worked so beautifully that it looked almost like a man's hair.

The mask had affected the woman strangely from the moment she had first seen it – *after* she had left the hotel in Bayswater. That had happened so long ago that it was like something in a dream and only partly remembered. At the time there had been the excitement of danger and the elation of success, but now she hardly remembered the face of the little Oriental whom she had fooled so successfully.

Someone passed outside the window.

The cabin was on A Deck, and there was a promenade walk all around here, used mainly by Tourist class passengers. The window had plain glass on one side and a frosted glass shutter on the inside; this was closed and fastened. It was very hot in the cabin despite the air from the louvres, the whirring fan, and the vents of the shutter.

A man was saying: "And I said to him, he ought to come and spend a year in Kenya. He'd soon change his tune."

"It's a waste of time arguing with them. They don't understand."

The voices and the footsteps died away.

Melody looked away from the mask into the mirror. She was shocked by her own pallor. It was absurd, but the mask had that effect on her. She hated it already. It seemed touched with malevolence and evil. She told herself that this was her own ridiculous way of seeing it; no inanimate thing could be malevolent.

She glanced down and it seemed as if a living face was glaring up at her.

She gave a little shiver, picked up a sandalwood box which was very light, and opened it. The mask fitted inside, face downwards. Some kind of spongy material lined the oval-shaped hole in which it sat. She picked it up gingerly, for she had been afraid of dropping it ever since she had brought it away from the Compton Hotel. She placed it into its receptacle carefully, and closed the lid. Almost at once she felt better.

"I need a drink!" she exclaimed, and rang for her steward.

While waiting for him, she thought over all that had led up to this. She worked for an obscure jewel merchant who specialised in Oriental jewellery – a man named Harding, Jimmy Harding. She wasn't exactly in love with Jimmy but that hadn't stopped them from having an on-off kind of affair for over a year. She had learned that he dealt in stolen jewellery, and the realisation had shocked her at first, but gradually she had come to accept it. She had lost count of the number of pieces of jewellery she had sold to unsuspecting people, usually visitors to London. It was quite easy: a casual acquaintance, talk of jewellery, talk of a bargain—

Melody had become very skilled at the business.

When Jimmy had told her about Toji, she had not been greatly worried. Someone whom Jimmy knew in Bangkok had sent the coded cable with the information, and Jimmy had been sure it was reliable. She had to meet Toji, say she was Mannering's confidential secretary, and take the jeweller to the Compton Hotel where, she knew, Jimmy had booked a room under the name of Mannering. Jimmy had seen to everything: her ticket to Gibraltar, a hotel for a night, then a flight home unless she received other instructions at Gibraltar.

The first thing she had not bargained for was the death of Toji. Why had the old fool had to kill himself? It had shocked her badly when someone had talked about that at dinner; one of her seven table companions who had heard about Toji's death on the radio.

The second thing she had not bargained for was the effect of the mask on her. Even in its beautifully smooth and perfectly-made box, it seemed to leer.

"Nonsense!" she said aloud.

A moment later there was a tap at the door and the steward, small and dark-skinned, came in with her drink. She smiled at him as she always smiled at men. When he had gone she drank half the whisky in one gulp, then sipped the rest slowly. She felt tired. She had been up too late last night, dancing with Jimmy.

A tall, blond man going back to his farm in Kenya would have taken her to his cabin if she had given him the slightest encouragement. She was almost sorry that she hadn't felt in the mood.

She yawned.

Perhaps half-an-hour's sleep would do her good.

She slipped out of her cotton dress, a pattern of sunflowers on green, and stood for a moment looking at her reflection in the mirror. She certainly had a figure which the Kenya farmer hadn't missed. She loosened her brassiere,

pictured the blond farmer, smiled, yawned, and got on the bed.

Soon, she was asleep.

Soon, she was dead.

The door of Melody Yesling's cabin opened. A man appeared, looking round the door. He was short and olive-skinned, and wore a dark serge suit, rather like a cabin boy's. He peered round the door and saw the recumbent figure of the girl. He came in, closed the door, and locked it. He moved to her side and felt her pulse; his sharp-featured face was expressionless. He nodded, then took out a small cardboard pill-box. He handled this with great care, placing it between the dead girl's thumb and forefinger. He made two or three different impressions this way, then took the box – careful to hold it by the edges. He opened the girl's handbag and dropped the box inside.

Next, he picked up the sandalwood box, opened it, took out the mask and stared at it. For the first time, he showed some expression; he smiled. Then he wrapped the box up in a sheet of brown paper and tucked it under his arm.

Mannering stood near the Moorish Castle on Gibraltar, looking out to sea. Along a steep, narrow road to his right was a road leading to the old galleries, where Gibraltar had withstood the sieges of old wars, and had added each time another powerful reason why the Rock should be forever British. In front of Mannering the tower of the Moorish Castle, built a thousand years before the British had arrived, might by the same token argue that the Moors should hold the Rock this very day.

Mannering wasn't thinking of any of these things; he was watching the open sea. Several vessels seemed to float on a faint blue haze which rose off the water. One, larger than the rest, was a single-funnelled vessel, with good lines but a very large black and white funnel. The hull was painted white. This was the *East Africa Star.* He judged that it would be half-an-hour before the vessel lay to, and perhaps an hour and a half before the tender brought the passengers ashore, some to stay, some to spend a few hours ashore before hurrying to the ship for the next stage in their voyage.

Mannering turned round to his taxi. The driver was standing by it, a short, burly man in a sky-blue shirt and khaki trousers.

"You want to see St. Michael's Cave, now, mister?"

"Later," said Mannering. "Take me to the Rock Hotel, please."

"Yes, sir." The taxi man beamed. "St. Michael's Cave is very big. Whole operas play there. You should see it."

"Later," Mannering insisted firmly.

He stepped out of the taxi ten minutes later. Men were working on the Rock Hotel, and half-a-dozen were squatting, hammering and banging. Beyond these, two couples were sitting and drinking on a pleasant terrace. Mannering went into the cool, modern hotel, and asked the receptionist: "Is there any message for me, please?"

"Yes, Mr. Mannering. Your wife telephoned. She will call you again at

eleven o'clock. She said it is a very urgent matter." The receptionist leaned forward. "There is much excitement on Gibraltar today, Mr. Mannering."

"Is there?"

"There is some reason to think a criminal is on board the *East Africa Star,*" the receptionist declared in a hushed voice. "The police are to meet the ship. No one may bring anything off without it being examined. Customs will be *very* strict."

"Oh," said Mannering. "I wonder what that's all about."

He went up to his room, uneasy as he had been from the beginning of this case. He had flown in the previous evening, and the Public Relations officer of the Government of Gibraltar had arranged the room for him here and given him every facility.

"If there is anything else I can do just tell me," he had said. "If it's possible, I'll fix it."

Mannering stepped to the window. He could not see the ship from here but he could see the bay, and some of the harbour installations. An aeroplane seemed to catapult past his window. He was wondering what the police were after and telling himself it could not be anything to do with Melody Yesling when his telephone bell rang.

"A call from London for you, Mr. Mannering.

There was a pause. Then: "Is that you, John?" It was Lorna.

"Hallo, my sweet!"

"John, have you heard?"

"I shouldn't think so."

"They know the girl's on the *East Africa Star*!"

"Who knows?" asked Mannering.

"Bristow and the police," said Lorna. "Bristow telephoned to ask where you were. He said they had traced the blonde, a Melody Yesling who called herself Mary Yates, to the ship, and were going to pick her up at Gibraltar."

"Well, well!" said Mannering softly.

"You don't seem very excited."

"I'm being wise after the event," said Mannering. "If I'd told Bristow about that label I'd be in his good books. Did you tell him where I was?"

"No."

"He'll probably find out," Mannering said. "But don't let him find out from you. How is Pearl Toji?"

"She seems very well," Lorna said. "I don't really know what's going on behind those sad eyes of hers, but I think she's content to stay here until you get back. She's had two visits from Consular officials. They're taking it very seriously. Have you read Larraby's notes on Sumi?"

"I know them backwards," Mannering said.

"As far as I can judge they give you the reasons why everyone is so worried," Lorna said.

"Did Bristow say anything else?" asked Mannering.

"He's sent Chief Inspector Gordon to Gibraltar with a photograph of the blonde," Lorna said. "Darling, try not to get too deeply involved too soon. If

it *is* a political matter you'll be in trouble."

"You mean I'll be out of my depth," Mannering said drily. "It looks as if Gordon will pick up the girl and the mask here, and that will be that. Don't worry, my sweet."

When he rang off he had a real feeling of deep dissatisfaction, almost of frustration, which he could not shrug off. He thought over Larraby's notes on the situation in Sumi. That tiny kingdom had become a republic only a year ago – and the operation had been so trivial by normal standards that no one had taken much interest in it. Sumi, however, was in an important strategic position in the Laos–Thailand part of the world. There were reports that some of Prince Asri's family were not really democratic and wanted the dynasty to be revived. Asri himself appeared to be a sincere democrat but this did not make him popular with his family.

Nor had his marriage to a girl from a good but not blood royal Thai family. Princess Kana was a courtesy title.

There was no doubt that the mask and the jewels had great cash value, probably well over two million pounds. But was that sufficient to affect the economy even of a tiny state? Or were political strings being pulled?

Lorna obviously thought so.

Bristow may have thought so, too.

These were not the only reasons for disquiet. Mannering had planned to find and to follow Melody Yesling, but if she was picked up by the police it would certainly be better to keep out of the way. It was defeat, of a kind. He knew Chief Inspector Gordon, a man who had very little time or liking for him, and it would be wise if not palatable to avoid an encounter. Yet to fly back tamely to London wasn't at all the way he wanted to meet his obligation to the dead man.

Mannering checked the aircraft time tables and was about to call the booking agency when there was a tap at his door.

"Come in," he called.

The door opened on Dottie Mills, taking him completely by surprise.

"Why Mr. Mannering, what a *surprise* to find you here!" she exclaimed. She strode towards him, right hand outstretched. "How *do* you do? And what a wonderful view. Superb. Can you see the *East Africa Star* from here?"

"I'm told that you can't," Mannering replied, heavily.

Dottie pressed close to the window.

"Oh, *what* a shame!" She swung round on him, face thrust forward. "When my editor heard you had flown here, he told me to hurry in your wake. Do you *really* think those diamonds will be brought off at Gib?"

"It's possible."

"So many things are possible, aren't they?" said Dottie. "Even the most unlikely coincidences! Such as Nikko Toji wanting to see you, and a *darling* little Thai girl visiting you in London, and the disappearance of that ridiculous mask, too. Masks always remind me of Hallowe'en. Don't they you?" She beamed into Mannering's face. "Are you after this Melody Yesling, Mr. Mannering? The news broke early this morning and my editor

thought it worth sending me here on a charter aircraft, knowing how well-disposed you are towards me."

Mannering laughed, suddenly in a better mood.

"I should have known better than to try to fool you."

"Yes, you should, shouldn't you?" Dottie said sweetly. "But I'll forgive you if you promise not to do it again. John dear, couldn't we work together on this. I promise you nothing would be published until it was all over bar the shouting. My editor has given me instructions to be *very* discreet."

Her big mouth gaped.

"Let's decide whether to work together when we know what's happening," Mannering said. "There may be nothing to work on.

"Oh, but there's bound to be," cried Dottie. "Haven't you heard? *All* the Asri Dynasty crown jewels have been stolen. That's what all the fuss is about. In fact that's almost certainly why Toji killed himself – to escape from the shame of dealing with stolen jewels. And think of all the political repercussions, absolutely thrilling, darling. Did *you* know they were stolen?"

"No," lied Mannering. He did not think she believed him, and wondered what the police were thinking of him then.

It was almost a relief when his telephone rang.

"Mannering," he said.

"I thought you would like to know that the *East Africa Star* has dropped anchor," the receptionist told him.

Chapter Six

ROCKS

It was pointless to try to pretend to Dottie or anyone that he wasn't here because of the Mask of Sumi, Mannering realised. It would be better to show himself at the jetty, and get the first encounter with Gordon over. He turned round to Dottie.

"The police are going to board the *East Africa Star,*" he told her. "There's your story for you. But if you let them know how you found out, that will be the last piece of inside information you'll ever get from me."

"Bless you, John!" cried Dottie Mills. "You're a doll!"

She was out of the room before he could reach the door.

Half-an-hour later he was at the quayside, standing beneath a sign reading *Welcome to Gibraltar.* The roof of the shed gave shade and coolness; two steps away in the blazing, blinding sunlight, the heat was almost unbearable. A couple of hundred yards out the big tender was approaching, packed with passengers and looking rather like the *Bournemouth Belle* on its way to the Isle of Wight. The sun burnished the white sides of the *East Africa Star*, which was a quarter of a mile further away.

At another spot further along the quayside were a dozen Gibraltarian policemen, for all the world like London bobbies allowed to dispense with their tunics because of the heat. In a patch of dark shade were two officers of the force, two Customs men, and tall, dark, aloof-looking Chief Inspector Gordon of New Scotland Yard.

None of these appeared to have noticed Mannering, who was standing in the shade. There was no sign of Dottie. Two or three Gibraltarians, brown, hardy-looking men, waited for the tender to come alongside, one of them holding a rope as thick as his wrist. Beyond, the sea was like blue glass.

Soon, the tender bumped against the quay; within seconds, a gangway had been pushed across. The police lined up on either side and a man called out on a loud-speaker fastened just above Mannering's head: "Ladies and gentlemen, we regret any inconvenience caused, but the Gibraltarian Police need to examine any luggage, packets or parcels which visitors may be carrying. The examination for each person need take only a second. We will be grateful for your co-operation."

The passengers began to chatter among themselves as they came off. Most were empty-handed, and were passed through without comment. Most wore lightweight clothes, many only shirts and shorts, or cotton dresses, and none of these could be hiding anything as large as the Mask of Sumi. Two or three with shopping bags were called aside, others with big cameras inside cases opened them unprotestingly. As the flow passed the inspection they climbed into taxis and little horses and carts, and were hustled towards the town or the Rock itself.

A short, dark man, empty-handed, appeared at the end of the line of policemen. He wore a dark suit, and a packet might be hidden under it. One of the policemen called him aside. For the first time, Mannering noticed a man who looked scared. He wondered if the police realised that. Gordon and the senior officers were busy with a couple who had two valises and were arguing volubly.

The little man took off his coat. He watched the men search it and there was no doubt at all that he was very much on edge. Mannering watched him. The police gave him back his coat, and one of them helped him to put it on. He hurried off.

Mannering saw a blonde woman, and stepped forward to see better. The little man saw him, and gasped: "No!"

He was so near that only Mannering heard him clearly. Mannering switched his gaze from the blonde, who had a child clutching her skirts. He saw the terror on the little man's face.

Terror – at sight of *him*.

Mannering stood squarely in front of the man, who hesitated for a split second then turned and began to hurry towards the row of taxis. Mannering was caught between the desire to follow him and eagerness to see whether the police found the woman they were looking for.

The little man reached the nearest taxi, looked over his shoulder, and jumped into the back. His expression was still so full of terror that Mannering made a decision on the instant. He noted the number of the taxi, with its GBZ sign, and strode to his own, which was parked a few yards off.

"Follow that pale blue Austin Cambridge," he said.

"At once, sir. You wish to go to the Cave?"

"Just follow the Austin Cambridge."

"Yes, sir!"

The taxi was soon in an area where new buildings were springing up everywhere. It turned at a roundabout with a fountain in the middle, and quickly reached a place called Ragged Hill. The Austin turned left, past some military. Mannering's driver glanced over his shoulder and beamed.

"St. Michael's Cave!" he called in jubilation.

The road was narrow and steep. At sharp turnings signs pointed to The Cave and to The Apes. Dust rose on either side, covering the bushes and the hedges. A cloud of dust ahead showed where the Austin was. The taxi slowed down at a corner on a steep gradient, the driver hooted his horn violently, and rasped his gears as he took the bend.

A long way ahead on another gradient, the blue car stood stationary. A man jumped out of it and leapt up the hillside, disappearing almost at once. A second later and Mannering would have missed him. Mannering's driver raised one hand in despair, but set the car against the gradient. The engine roared.

The blue car went on. Mannering caught a glimpse of a *No Entry* sign. He judged the place where the man had jumped from the taxi and tapped his driver on the shoulder.

"Stop, please."

The man half-turned.

"*Stop?*" Amazement made his voice shrill.

"Stop, *now,*" ordered Mannering.

"But the Cave—"

"Damn the Cave!" Mannering pulled a pound note out of his pocket, and thrust it into the man's lap. The car was now moving very slowly. He opened the door and jumped out.

"Wait where you can," he called.

He espied a gap in the hedge and hoped that was where the man from the *East Africa Star* had gone. Some broken twigs showed on either side of a narrow path. Branches caught at his clothes as he pushed on. The hillside was very steep, and clumps of shrubs and coarse grass dotted it. The sun burned down. Mannering narrowed his eyes and peered about the hillside.

Fifty yards or so ahead, to his right, he saw a little haze of dust as if someone had been there recently. He climbed towards it, half crouching, occasionally touching the hot, sandy soil with his hands.

He saw something rise in the air, twenty yards away. It came from behind a bush, and he saw a movement half hidden by the bush. A rock, the size of a man's clenched hand, struck the earth close by him. Another whistled close to his head, a third hit him on the shoulder with staggering force. He backed, missed a step, recovered, and saw the terrified man standing in the open in the act of hurling another stone. It came straight at Mannering, who ducked hurriedly. He felt it touch his hair.

This man's throwing was almost deadly, and one of those stones could do a lot of damage. Three came in quick succession. He flung up his arm to cover his face. Off balance, he began to stagger backwards. A stone struck his wrist painfully, another smacked against his thigh.

He tripped and fell.

Something like panic seized him as he hit the ground; for that moment he was a sitting bird. Unable to see clearly because dust got into his eyes, he covered his head with his arms and looked round for cover, body hunched up to meet another blow.

None came.

He heard a kind of scrambling sound. He was on one knee, facing outwards towards the calm blue sea, and the only sound in the stillness was that scrambling. He twisted round. The little man was hurtling towards him, and the sunlight glinted on a knife in his hand.

In this moment of acute danger the panic died away. Tensely, Mannering waited in a crouching position, the sheer drop only a few yards behind him. The man's swarthy face looked pale in the bright light, and his eyes glittered like crystals. The knife was held ready for thrust or throw.

Mannering thought: he'll throw.

He remembered the accuracy of that stone-throwing, saw the arm flex, and dodged to the right. The knife passed within inches of his face, at eye level. The attacker was trying to stop himself from coming so fast, but could

not.

Mannering dodged again, and shot out a leg.

His assailant kicked against it, pitched forward and disappeared over the edge of that steep cliff.

Gasping for breath, Mannering straightened up. Dust rose above the cliff and a rustling sound came, too, somehow ominous and menacing. It stopped, and the dust began to settle. Then came the clatter of footsteps, and men's voices. Mannering peered over the edge. On the road some fifty or sixty feet below him the body of his assailant was spreadeagled. A British soldier and the taxi driver were running down towards him.

Two hours later, his left wrist bandaged where the stone had cut and bruised him, Mannering sat in a small room near the entrance to St. Michael's Cave. Two Gibraltarian policemen in plainclothes and Chief Inspector Gordon were in the room with him. Mannering had answered all Gordon's questions, and made a comprehensive statement. Gordon's manner was aloof but not actually hostile.

Now, he said: "Why didn't you ask for help at the quay? There were plenty of policemen about."

"Police would hardly have jumped to it if I'd told them I thought the chap had a guilty look, would they?"

"I suppose not," Gordon conceded. "Did the man see or speak to anyone?"

"Not as far as I could tell, but he was out of my sight for a few minutes. He didn't have that mask with him – the police searched him too thoroughly."

"Glad you noticed that," said a big, smiling Gibraltarian. "I think Inspector Gordon believes we let him go through with it."

"If he didn't have the mask, or something he shouldn't have with him, why should he be so scared of Mannering?" asked Gordon logically. He waved a hand. "Oh, I know you chaps made sure he didn't have the mask, but there is another possibility, isn't there?"

"What is it?"

"You're slipping," Gordon said, with obvious relish. "The man could have taken the jewels out of their setting – the mask – and carried them in a much smaller container, possibly loose in his pockets."

The Gibraltarian said flatly: "Well, he didn't have them, and he'll never tell us why he behaved like he did."

"So he's dead," Mannering said heavily.

"Landed head first," announced the local policeman, with welcome brevity. "No name, no address, only a little money in his pocket. He was booked for Port Said. His name was Yiman Ali. He'd booked a week before the *East Africa Star* sailed, through a Thomas Cook's office. Cook's say he was a chance customer."

"You've been busy," Mannering said thoughtfully.

"By telephone we're as near London as Brighton is," the Gibraltarian declared.

“Is there any trace of jewellery in his pockets?” asked Mannering.

“Could you tell?” Gordon demanded.

“If there were small gems one might have fallen out,” Mannering answered. “And some stones will make cuts on certain material. It ought to be possible to see if he had loose stones in his pockets. Apart from the stones he threw at me. I felt as if I was at the wrong end of an anti-tank gun.”

“Let’s have his clothes in,” said Gordon.

They turned the pockets of the dead man’s clothes inside out, and found nothing to suggest he had carried gems. By that time Mannering felt sure that they had not found Melody Yesling *alias* Mary Yates but he hadn’t inquired: with a man like Gordon, almost saturnine in appearance and still very aloof in manner, asking the obvious was asking for a rebuff.

Gordon turned to him, half-smiling.

“Are you fully recovered now, Mr. Mannering?”

“I’m all right,” Mannering said. “Is there any need to stay here any longer?”

“No. I would like you to come and view the other body.”

“*Other* body?” Mannering was startled.

“So you didn’t know that when we failed to find Melody Yesling among the passengers who came ashore, we went on board the *East Africa Star* and found her dead in her cabin. She’d killed herself by taking poison, just as Nikko Toji did.”

Chapter Seven

SECOND VICTIM

Mannering stared down on the blonde girl's body.

She looked quite lovely, as if in sleep. Nothing suggested fear or anxiety or greed; hers was the peace of death. Her blonde hair framed her head like a golden halo.

"Have you ever seen her before?" asked Gordon.

"No."

"She works for a competitor of yours."

"Who?"

"A man named Harding, James Harding."

"Of Chelsea? Fulham Road somewhere."

"Do you know him?" Gordon said heavily.

"I've bought a few pieces from him occasionally, but I never feel I can rely on the quality of his goods," Mannering said. In fact he knew that Harding sometimes bought stolen jewels and tried to pass them off in the trade but that was a matter between the dealer and the police.

"Have you done any business with him lately?"

"Not for a year or more."

"Do you know if he specialises?"

"No," said Mannering. "I don't particularly like him."

"Funny you should say that," said Gordon. "Nor do we." He obviously meant that the police had their suspicions of Harding, but he did not commit himself any further. "Well, we'd better get the body ashore and flown back to England. I'll see the Captain of the *East Africa Star*. He's being most co-operative, but he wants to sail on time."

"Do you need this cabin locked and sealed?" asked the Gibraltarian policeman.

"It wouldn't do much good. We've been over it, and had all necessary photographs taken. Unless there's anything more you'd like to do here, we can hand it back to the ship."

"We've finished," the local man said.

When they went outside the narrow passage was crowded with people. At the Purser's Bureau Hall, Dottie Mills was lurking. She kept making signs to Mannering.

He joined her.

"No," he said simply.

"Mr. Mannering, you can do the *Globe* a very great favour."

"I doubt if I'm in a position to do anyone a favour," Mannering said.

"Oh yes you are. My editor has recalled me, and I have to fly back. Will you be a special reporter for the *Globe* for the rest of the trip?"

Mannering actually chuckled.

"No, Dottie, I will not. But if I can give you a story afterwards, I certainly will. Sure the editor won't stake you as far as Aden?"

"I only wish he would," said Dottie wistfully. She took his hand between both of hers. "Do your best for us, John, won't you?"

She went off, like a happy ugly duckling.

Gordon and the local police had gone away, presumably to see the ship's Captain. Mannering stepped to the grille of the main bureau, and a plump man in snow white uniform looked at him pleasantly.

"Good afternoon, sir."

"Good afternoon. Can I book a passage?" Mannering asked.

"I think we can fix you up, sir, quite a number of passengers disembarked at Gib. Where are you going, sir?"

"Mombasa," Mannering said thoughtfully. He knew the ports of call, and he knew Mombasa was a major one, where the ship stayed for several days; it was as good a place as any to book for now.

"First class, sir?"

"Yes, please. Cabin 73, preferably."

The plump man started.

"73, sir? Why, that's where—"

"Miss Yesling's cabin, I know."

"You *want* that cabin?"

"If it's available."

"I'll have to check with the Purser, sir. We may wish to leave that room empty. Have you brought your luggage?"

"It's at the Rock Hotel," Mannering said. "I'll have to nip back and pack."

The plump assistant Purser seemed to be more embarrassed than ever.

"I'm sorry, sir, but the only tender—*oh!* You came with the police party, didn't you?"

"Yes. They'll look after me, I'm sure," Mannering said.

He turned round, to find Gordon at his elbow. Gordon was frowning, and yet his manner was still not really hostile; Mannering had known him much more sour than this with less excuse. Gordon was alone.

"Spare me a minute, Mr. Mannering?"

"Of course."

Gordon moved to the far side of the hall. Three Indian stewards were gathered in a silent group.

"So you're going ahead with the ship," Gordon said.

"Yes, that's right."

"You think the mask is still on board."

"If ever it was on board – yes, I do."

"So do I," said Gordon. "And so does Mr. Bristow. We can't be absolutely certain but there isn't much doubt that the dead woman got it from Toji. It's possible that she gave it to someone else, but it isn't likely they would send her to Gibraltar as a decoy. The incident with the man who attacked you makes it pretty certain that he was involved, recognised you, and was scared out of his wits."

"It could be," Mannering agreed.

"As he didn't have the mask, and it hasn't been brought ashore as far as we can trace, the *East Africa Star* is the best bet," said Gordon. "The Captain has promised to be as helpful as he can, and Lister, his Master-at-Arms, is an ex-Scotland Yard man, but Mr. Bristow thinks you're more likely to trace the mask than anyone else."

Mannering murmured: "Nice of him."

"You know that I'm not a great lover of amateur detectives," said Gordon. "But I agree with my Chief this time. You're the man for this job."

"Ah," said Mannering. "What about the Captain? Does he know the true situation?"

"I've just discussed the situation with Captain Cross," Gordon said. "There are obvious difficulties for him whichever way we work. If there should be an official search of the ship, it would soon get round. Some passengers would get angry, others would start a lot of gossip, and the man we're after would be on the alert all the time. You can understand all this, can't you?"

"Perfectly," Mannering said. "But the Captain can't possibly give me the all clear to search. Not if I know ships' captains!"

"You obviously know ships' captains," said Gordon. "No – but you could work on the passengers and single out suspects, then co-operate with the Captain and the Master-at-Arms."

"I see," said Mannering.

"You don't seem too enthusiastic."

"If ever there was a case for working on my own without having to call on authority, this is it," said Mannering.

"If you started visiting cabins and searching them they'd probably have you in irons within a couple of days," said Gordon. "I'm sure this is the best way. Will you go ahead?"

"Yes," said Mannering. "How much is known, Gordon?"

"Nothing for certain," said Gordon. "We've been in touch with the police in Bangkok and in Sumi. There's a possibility that the theft has a political motive – as you know. And it's quite as likely that it's just the loot the thieves are after. There's one rumour we can't confirm."

"What is it?"

"That the secret of the hiding place of the rest of the jewels can be found in the mask," answered Gordon. "But it's only a rumour."

"It could explain why a life or so doesn't stand in anyone's way," Mannering said. "Gordon."

"Yes, Mr. Mannering."

"Do you think Melody Yesling killed herself?"

"It would be quite a coincidence if she had," Gordon said. "You know the dangers all right. They've killed twice."

"I know the dangers." As Mannering spoke, he thought of Lorna, and he realised just how great those dangers were. He recalled those moments of panic on the hillside, but the killer of Nikko Toji and Melody Yesling had worked with stealth. The killer might be on board; almost certainly someone

on the ship had the Mask of Sumi, and would kill to get it for its intrinsic value, its political significance, or because it could lead to the rest of the jewels.

"There's one other thing," Gordon said.

"Have you any idea whom I might be looking for?" Mannering asked.

"No, nothing like that," said Gordon. "If we learn anything from the Yard, through Harding for instance, I'll see you're told by cable or radio-telephone. I'm going to be much more prosaic, I fear. Mr. Bristow feels that if you are able to help it would be as an official consultant, and your expenses would be paid. I hope that's acceptable, Mr. Mannering."

Mannering stared, and then burst into a chuckle.

"Sorry," he said a moment later. "The *Daily Globe* made me a similar offer. Expenses would be very welcome!"

"Within reason," Gordon put in quickly.

"Most certainly within reason," Mannering assured him.

He kept chuckling to himself on the way to the quay in a police launch which cut cleanly through the pale blue water. The side of the great rock seemed to carve a chunk out of the sky; a wisp of cloud lay across its top. They tied up, and nearby an aeroplane screamed as its engines warmed up.

"Mr. Mannering," said the Gibraltarian policeman, "I'd be happy to have one of my men show you round the island. It's a pity to get so near the Cave without going inside, and there's a lot you ought to see."

"I only wish I had time," said Mannering truthfully. "But as soon as I've packed my things I'll have to catch the tender. It goes at six-forty-five, doesn't it?"

"Yes. And Captain Cross will be off the moment he can, he never loses a minute," the policeman said. "Any time you find yourself in Gibraltar, Mr. Mannering, don't hesitate to let me know. My name is Davis."

"I'm very grateful, Mr. Davis," Mannering said.

He was even more grateful when Davis put a staff car at his disposal to take him to the Rock Hotel. He had less than an hour to pack, pay his bill and be off, and fit in a telephone call to Lorna. She could not be surprised at what he had decided, but she would be very anxious, especially if the Press played up the stone-throwing incident.

His left wrist, stiff and sore, did not help him to hurry.

He put in a call to Lorna, noted a few things he must ask her to arrange with Larraby at Quinns. Naturally an orderly man with a precise mind, he packed quickly and well. But he had very little to wear for a long voyage, and if he had to go through as far as Mombasa, he would need tropical clothes. He knew what the heat of the Red Sea was like. Was there a chance of a little shopping in Gib?

There was a tap at his door. He called out, "Come in," and stepped to one side, wary in case of danger; now that his mind was alert to the possibility of attack he would be on the *qui vive* all the time.

The door opened, and Nikko Toji's daughter stepped in.

Pearl was small, and quite, quite lovely.

When she had first come to the Chelsea flat, Mannering had seen at once how Lorna had been impressed, and then they had been expecting her. Now, completely unexpected, wearing a slim-fitting dress of lemon-coloured linen, and a small hat to match, she came in like a wraith.

Mannering judged from her expression that she wasn't quite sure what kind of welcome she would get. She stared straight at him with a directness which was at once naïve and yet filled with the wisdom of the ages. Her skin, olive-coloured but not really dark, was without blemish; her eyes were honey-coloured. Her heart-shaped face had something of the child's about it, and her dark hair had a sheen as glossy as a raven's wing.

"Good afternoon," she said. "May I come in?"

"My dear Pearl!" exclaimed Mannering.

"I expect you are angry because I am here."

"I'm not angry but I'm certainly startled," Mannering said, and made himself ask: "Why did you come?"

"I had to see you."

"Has anything new happened?"

"No," said Pearl. She spoke with bell-like clarity, choosing her words with care; the American accent was less noticeable than on the telephone. She took a step forward, hands stretched out. "Have you found the mask?"

"No," Mannering said gently.

"Was not the woman here?"

Mannering said: "She was here."

"Then she did not have the mask?" Consternation rang in Pearl Toji's voice.

"Not when she was found."

"Mr. Mannering." Pearl was now so close that her hands almost touched his. "What is wrong?"

"She died," Mannering said.

"She was killed?"

"The police say she killed herself."

Excitement blazed up in the girl's eyes.

"With poison, like my father? Is that what happened?"

"Exactly the same way, yes."

"They can't believe that two people would kill themselves in such a way!"

"They're not as sure as they were," Mannering told her. "It's too much of a coincidence even for the police to accept."

After a pause, Nikko Toji's daughter said: "So she was killed, but you did not find the mask. Is it now on Gibraltar?"

"I don't think so."

"Then—where?"

"On board the ship."

"Still there?" Doubt and dismay clouded Pearl's eyes.

"I think so."

"Then how can it be found? The ship's Captain, is he going to look for

it?"

Mannering smiled. "No. I am."

Pearl caught her breath.

"You are to sail on the ship?"

"Yes."

"To look for the mask. Is that your only reason?"

"Yes," Mannering said. "I think it's the one way to—"

The telephone bell rang; it was probably his call to Lorna. He turned towards it, glad to have a moment's respite, and picked it up. "I think this is my wife." Voices came and went, and then Lorna's came – explosively.

"John!"

"Yes, I know," Mannering said. "She's here."

"Is she with you?"

"She arrived ten minutes ago," Mannering said.

"I didn't realise she'd gone when I telephoned before," Lorna told him. "I thought she was resting in the spare room." There was a pause; then she asked with a kind of stubborn hopefulness: "Is it over, John?"

"No," Mannering said. "I only wish it were. I'm going on with the *East Africa Star,* my darling. There's a good chance that we'll find the mask on board."

"I had a feeling that might happen," Lorna said resignedly. "Be very careful."

That was all. No hint of reproach, nothing but 'be very careful'. Yet Mannering needed no telling how afraid for him she was. Tomorrow, when she read in the papers exactly what had happened here, her fears would increase as they had so often before, but she would not write or do or say anything to add to his difficulties or his anxieties. He was a thousand miles and more away from her yet he had never felt so close.

"I'll be careful," Mannering said. "Sweet, make a few notes for Josh Larraby will you?"

"Yes."

Mannering dictated some routine notes, and then went on: "Ask him to find out all he can about James Harding, the Chelsea dealer—" Mannering explained why. "And tell him to cable me in the Antiquarians' code – they're not likely to have a copy of that on board the *East Africa Star.* I'll telephone from the ship if there's any need, but I won't make it routine."

"All right," Lorna said. "What about Pearl?"

"She'll fly back later today," Mannering said. "Try to persuade her to stay with you until—"

He broke off, for Pearl Toji thrust a slip of paper in front of him. It read: "Please tell your wife not to worry about me. I also shall be on the *East Africa Star.*"

Chapter Eight

ON BOARD

Mannering sat in the tender with Pearl by his side, aware of the countless covert glances from the passengers going back after a few hours on the Rock. Sun-browned and sun-reddened faces and knees, short-sleeved shirts and dresses, shorts and T-shirts, made a kind of homogeneous mass. Except for a child clinging to its mother's knees and whining, everyone seemed happy. A boy of five or six suddenly started to climb on to the tender's rail. His mother shrieked: "Nigel! You'll fall!"

A man grabbed the boy.

Someone said: "Doesn't she look beautiful."

Two men glanced at Pearl. "Oh, she's a fine ship," another man put in.

Mannering, his leg against Pearl's, glanced down at her and saw how intently she was staring across the still water towards the *East Africa Star*. Two or three people moved into position for a photograph. Mannering had not taken much notice of the ship until now, but as they neared it and it seemed to grow bigger, he felt a stirring of interest – even of pride – in her clean white lines, vivid as the late afternoon sun shone on her. A few people lined the ship's rails, a few moved about. Cameras clicked. A burst of laughter came from a group of teenagers in the bows.

Mannering leaned his head close to Pearl.

"What do you think of your fellow passengers?"

She looked up at him with a slow, thoughtful smile.

"Most people are good," she said simply.

"There's at least one very bad one on board if we're right."

"That is what my father always told me," said Pearl. "You look at fruit and there is one bad and you see it and throw it out. It is the same with fish, even the same with pearls. But with people you cannot tell."

"You can tell some people," Mannering declared.

"Yes, some perhaps. But among all these – can you say who is good and who is bad?"

"Not many people would think you were bad."

She smiled more freely. "How easily I could deceive them."

She looked away towards the ship. They were passing the bows and the ship itself was head-on to the Rock of Gibraltar which rose so dark and massive against a sky now clear of cloud.

The tender pulled alongside and the crowd surged towards the gangway. A few held back. A young man with sandy-coloured hair and a pleasant face came towards them.

"I haven't seen you on board, have I?"

"We're just coming on," Mannering said.

"Oh, good! We can do with a bit of brightening up." The young man's

eyes were on Pearl with deep admiration. “My name is Joslyn – Raymond Joslyn.”

“I’m John Mannering.”

“Glad to know you, Mr. Mannering.”

“May I introduce you to Miss Pearl Toji?”

“*Very* glad to know you!” Joslyn showed good teeth in an easy smile. “If you need anyone to show you round, just say the word.”

He turned away. A little dark man with a dozen garishly-coloured silk scarves over his arm was selling one to an elderly woman in black, otherwise the tender was almost empty. They went towards the gangway, which was quite steep as it led up from the tender to a doorway in the ship’s hull.

Joslyn stood back for Pearl. She stepped on the gangway. For a distance of no more than four feet there was nothing above her – the gangway was a kind of bridge. For a moment Pearl was in the bright sunlight.

From above, someone shouted: “Look out!”

Mannering, just behind the girl, glanced up and saw what seemed to be a dark, moving shadow on the white side of the ship. He thrust himself forward, pushed Pearl in the back so that she shot over the edge of the gangway into the arms of two waiting stewards. Mannering jumped forward. He felt the gangway shudder as something big and heavy crashed on to it. A woman screamed.

“My God!” cried one of the stewards.

There was a rending sound, a gasp, another scream. Mannering, staggering forward, was just aware of Pearl in the arms of a white-clad steward, of people dodging out of his way, of others looking horrified. He steadied, and looked round, fearfully.

Joslyn lay on the battered gangway with a heavy wooden deck chair on him.

“He’s all right, Mr. Mannering,” said Dr. Roughead, the ship’s surgeon. “Two or three days and he’ll be as good as new. No need to worry at all. How is the young lady?”

“Shaken and scared, that’s all.”

“Understandable, very understandable indeed. I shudder to think what would have happened had that heavy chair struck anyone so fragile. Sure there’s nothing I can do for her?”

“Nothing at all.”

“Or for you?” Dr. Roughead asked belatedly.

“No, I’m fine,” Mannering assured.

He escaped from the doctor and went towards the drawing-room, in the bows, then up a narrow flight of stairs to the bridge deck. An Indian sailor waited for him at the head of the stairs, and smiled shyly at Mannering’s thank you. Mannering reached an open doorway, and heard Captain Cross saying: “It’s hard to believe, Charles.”

“We may find someone yet.”

"May I come in?" asked Mannering.

"Oh, yes – we've been waiting for you."

Cross, a compact, dark-haired man in his fifties, stood up from a chair in a spacious room. He wore a white shirt and knee-length shorts, and gave an impression of strength held on a tight leash. "You've met Charles East, the Master-at-Arms, haven't you?"

"Briefly," said Mannering.

They shook hands.

"It's almost incredible, but we cannot find anyone who actually saw the beginning of the incident," said Cross. "Two able seamen say they saw a man standing on the boat deck at the time, but he was hidden by stanchions and all they saw was his back. He must have been standing immediately above the gangways. Passengers often take their own chairs up there, to get some quiet, and although they shouldn't, it's winked at. It couldn't have fallen, though."

"No accident, then," said Mannering.

"It simply wasn't possible."

"There isn't much doubt that it was an attempt on your life," East said. He was a big, hard-faced, hard-eyed man with a big jaw.

"Oh, come!"

"Don't you think so?" Cross sounded as if he was commanding Mannering to agree with him. His eyes, grey and alert, had the disconcerting directness of a man used to command.

"Would it have killed anyone?"

"If it had struck in the right place," East declared. "It was one of the heavy ones. If it had happened to hit Miss Toji it would at least have disfigured her."

"Yes," Mannering said. He did not voice his greatest fear: that the attack had really been on the girl. "I'd say it was meant to scare me, not to kill."

"I trust you're scared," Cross said. "Mr. Mannering, we have five days' sailing across the Mediterranean. It could be a very unpleasant voyage if we thought this kind of thing was likely to happen."

"Don't I know it," Mannering said ruefully.

"Are you sure the mask is aboard?" Again Cross gave the impression that he did not want to believe the obvious.

"No, but it seems very likely now," Mannering said. "If that was an attack on me—"

"You don't seriously doubt that, do you?" asked East. He seemed almost annoyed at the possibility of doubt.

"Not really," admitted Mannering. "And why should anyone try to kill, scare, or intimidate me if they didn't want to stop me looking for the mask?"

"Reasonable enough," East conceded.

"It's an ugly situation," said Cross gloomily.

"There's one thing we ought to remember," Mannering said. "The man with the mask knows I'm aboard but doesn't know I'm here with your approval."

East leaned forward.

"Meaning what?"

"If he's kept in ignorance of the help I can call on he's more likely to try again," Mannering said.

"You *want* him to?" Cross's voice rose.

"It might be the easiest and quickest way to catch him."

"I hand it to you," said Cross heavily.

"There's something in it," agreed East. "Yes. I think it would be better if there's no official association between us. But we can help a lot in the background, and make sure you're never absolutely on your own."

"I wouldn't do that," Mannering said. He smiled at Cross. "I might want to do things you wouldn't want to know about! Forget me, but keep a special eye on Miss Toji, will you?"

"I don't know what kind of thing you want to do on your own, but don't go too far, Mr. Mannering. My duty is to my passengers and the Company. I must watch the interests of both. You understand that, don't you?"

"Fully," Mannering said.

"And don't run away with the idea that you'll be able to do much without being noticed," said Cross. "There's always someone about." He frowned. "You seriously think we ought to watch Miss Toji?"

"If I know that East is looking after her I can do my job better."

"I'm not sure I shouldn't have put you both ashore," Cross said gruffly. "What do you intend to do first?"

"Size up the passengers," Mannering said simply. "Can you let me have a marked passenger list showing all the people you can vouch for?"

"There'll be no trouble about that," said Cross. "Most of the people on board are from Kenya, Uganda, or the Rhodesias – three quarters of them have been out and back with us at least twice before. A few are going out for the first time, mostly youngsters. Have you any idea what type of person you're looking for?"

"No."

"Or whether he's on his own or with his wife?"

"For all I know he could be with his wife and family," Mannering said. "But he's more likely to be on his own. This kind of caper isn't one you do with a crowd. They might be a man and woman travelling separately."

"How soon do you want the list marked?"

"Can it be today?"

"Yes, of course," said Cross. "I'll send it down to your cabin. When you've got it, you'll have to start sorting the passengers out, won't you?"

"I'm going to start on that right away," Mannering said.

"How?"

"Enter for all the sports and pastimes," Mannering said simply. "There's one other thing you could do for me."

"What's that?"

"Find a passenger about my build who could spare me a couple of pairs of shorts and a pair of shoes or sandals," Mannering said. "I can get shirts at

the shop."

"That'll be easy," said Cross. "Sir Harry Katman has a wardrobe big enough for a dozen people, and he's about your size. I'll get the Purser to introduce you."

"Thanks very much," Mannering said.

When he had left the Captain's cabin, Cross picked up a radio-telephone message from the Company he had received while at Gibraltar. It read:

> "Extend all reasonable facilities to John Mannering use your own judgment we will support you."

Cross smiled to himself, and then sent for the ship's surgeon for a report on the injured passenger.

Katman was almost identical in figure and height with Mannering, but a man in his sixties. He was affable and helpful. Mannering tried on a pair of navy blue shorts and a pair of wine-red swimming trunks and a pair of beautifully worked leather sandals.

"That's made all the difference in the world," he said.

"Pleasure, my dear chap," said Katman. "Let me know if there's anything else you need."

Mannering went off.

Pearl, in a cabin on the same deck, was wearing a cotton dress with a delicate pattern on it. Mannering could well understand how her beauty would affect the men on board.

"Now let's go and enter into the spirit of shipboard life," said Mannering.

"And remember that one of the passengers is a murderer," Pearl said, gravely.

The chairman of the Sports Committee was a Major Thomas, and his right-hand man was young Raymond Joslyn, who was soon up and about. A big board outside the main entrance hall was already covered with lists of Deck Games competitions. Mannering, under amiable pressure from Joslyn himself, cheerfully signed at the bottom of the lists headed:

> Table Tennis – men's singles
> " " – mixed doubles
> Deck Tennis – mixed doubles
> " " – men's singles
> Deck Quoits – mixed doubles
> " " – men's singles
> Shuffleboard – men's singles
> " " – mixed doubles

As he did so he studied the other names to help to familiarise himself with them. Several appeared on each list: Joslyn, Thomas, a man named Corrison, and several more. On the women's lists one of the most prominent was a

woman named Naomi Ransom.

Mannering played in the mixed games with Pearl, who had aptitude and some experience, and took all the games seriously. His left wrist was still swollen but did not handicap him very much. Gradually, he was able to put names to the faces of all the passengers in the games without showing too much curiosity. Everyone began to show personality and character, many dull, some lively, a few both lively and intelligent. Pearl, a little aloof at first, gradually lost her gravity and solemnness. She began to laugh more freely, as if the shadow of her father's death was already receding.

But she was watching, watching, all the time.

And so was Mannering.

Chapter Nine

SUSPECTS

Mannering recognised the South African and Rhodesian accents and the less noticeable accents of the Kenyans, the rather affected sound of some English voices. Gradually he became used to them. There was the inevitable core of hearty players and hearty talkers. Mannering met more and more men and women whose names were on the games boards, heard snippets of conversation, saw some elderly people obviously preoccupied, quite as many bored. A few sat about reading, mostly thrillers, a few westerns, a few heavy-looking tomes.

The sea was as calm as the Mediterranean could be, but a breeze kept the heat down.

Mannering studied his marked passenger list, and put first this, then that man off the suspects. Gradually, the picture took shape. Except for known people or obviously innocent ones going to Africa for the first time there were five men and three women on board who might be involved.

One of them was Katman.

Another was Geoffrey Nares, a man in his thirties, nearly as tall as Mannering, well-groomed, active. They met for the first time at deck quoits, passed the usual pleasantries, and then began to play in earnest. Mannering won with a point to spare.

"Now let me buy you a drink," Mannering said.

"Nice of you." They went to the ballroom, the sliding doors of which were all wide open. The heat was more oppressive today. Pearl was sitting with two youngish couples and Raymond Joslyn, whose right hand was bandaged and whose forehead was discoloured with bruises. It did not stop him from being good at games. Mannering waved across to her.

"You're *the* Mannering, aren't you?" asked Nares.

"I'm the Quinns Mannering," agreed Mannering lightly.

"Same thing. Is the Japanese girl any relation to Nikko Toji?"

Mannering said: "Yes. She's a Thai, by the way."

"Never can tell these Orientals apart," Nares said casually. Mannering began to dislike him. "Sly lot, on the whole. The Pearl of Thai doesn't seem particularly upset about papa, does she?"

Mannering felt almost a sense of shock.

"Orientals hide their feelings pretty well, too," he made himself say.

"A devoted daughter ought to be desolate about the death of her father," Nares said. "Surprising how westernised they're becoming."

"In some ways," Mannering temporised.

"What brings you to Africa?" asked Nares.

Mannering said briskly: "Business."

Nares chuckled.

"Nice tax excuse, anyhow! Oh, don't think I mind. We all do it. Do me a favour, will you?"

Mannering said: "If I can."

"Introduce me to the Pearl of Thai – she's really something in statistics, and she might have Western ideas about bed-life, too."

"She has very definite ideas about a lot of things," Mannering said.

He disliked Nares more than he had disliked a man for a long time, but that didn't make him the chief suspect.

An elderly, deeply tanned man with grizzled hair and the most piercing blue eyes stopped Mannering later that day.

"I think we have to play table tennis. My name's O'Keefe."

They shook hands.

"Aren't you John Mannering of Quinns?" asked O'Keefe.

"That's right."

"Often thought that too little attention is paid by antique dealers and people like yourself to Africa," said the grizzled man.

He was Ralph O'Keefe, according to the passenger list, and his occupation was listed on his passport as: *Independent Means.*

"How right you are," said Mannering.

"I could introduce you to a few people who know where to put their hands on some very valuable and rare things," O'Keefe volunteered.

"Really?"

"Let me know if I can help, won't you?"

"I certainly will," said Mannering. "Like to get this game over? The table's free."

O'Keefe was ten years older than Mannering, yet won in two straight, lively sets. They arranged a drink together.

"Now I'll go and hunt for my opponent in the semi-finals," said O'Keefe.

It was nearly lunchtime on the third day out. The chimes of the gong were clearly audible, most families had already gone down to tidy up for the meal. Mannering went along to his own cabin. There was a note on the mat, and he expected it to be an invitation to a cocktail party.

Instead, there were two sentences on *East Africa Star* paper.

> "If you interfere any further you will regret it. Enjoy your trip and get off at Port Said, taking the coloured girl with you."

Mannering thought almost with elation: "He's getting worried!"

He went down to luncheon. Pearl was already there with a middle-aged and a youngish couple who shared it with them. She was unrolling her table-napkin when a slip of paper fell out. It fluttered to the floor, and the Indian waiter bent down to retrieve it, quickly.

"Thank you." She was smiling with that quiet charm which distinguished her when she unfolded the paper. She glanced down – and immediately lost her colour. She looked as if she were badly shocked.

She tucked it into her dress, and from then on behaved quite naturally.

“Where is it?” Mannering asked her.

Pearl took the paper out of the neck of her dress and handed it to him. He opened it, and read:

> “Go home, you yellow-skinned bitch, or you’ll regret it. Fly from Port Said.”

Mannering said: “Pearl, I’m terribly sorry.”

“It is my own fault,” she said. “I came here against advice from the police.”

“Of course you came,” Mannering said.

Her eyes lit up.

“You think I was right?”

“If you’re your father’s daughter I don’t see what else you could have done,” Mannering said. “How far will you go?”

“I don’t understand you.”

“There are at least five men on board, any one of whom might be the man we’re after.”

“Yes, I know. They are Nares, O’Keefe, Katman, Corrison, and Mehta.” Corrison was an Australian who said he was going to explore the possibilities of large scale sheep farming in parts of the highlands.

“Kikuyu or no bloody Kikuyu,” he would say blandly.

Mehta was an Indian, whom rumour said was an Arab sheik travelling in disguise. He was a small but very handsome man, sallow-skinned, with a hooked nose. He was pleasant to everyone, and his manners and his accent had obviously been acquired in England.

“How well do you know them?” Mannering asked.

“Not very well.”

“Nares is anxious to get to know you better.”

“I am quite aware of that,” said Pearl, with feeling.

“You probably won’t find him very nice to know. But—”

“It might be helpful for me to get to know him and the others, you mean?”

“I think so. Talk to them and try to make them talk about themselves.”

“I will do this, of course.” Pearl had been very subdued since the note incident, but began to cheer up now. “I will do anything at all to find the man we are seeking.”

Mannering found that easy to believe.

“If Nares makes too much of a nuisance of himself—”

Mannering stopped, for he realised that her eyes were laughing at him. He squeezed her hand.

“Except for murderers, I can look after myself well,” she declared.

He was still feeling a little rueful, as he went on: “There’s one other thing, Pearl.”

“And what is that?”

"I want to search each man's cabin, soon."

"Oh," Pearl said, very thoughtfully. "I begin to see."

"And I need to be sure that he won't come in while I'm doing it."

"But, John, if anyone should see you, what will you do?"

"In everything except giving advice to beautiful young women I can handle things reasonably well," he retorted.

They laughed together; it was good to hear her happy, but he could not get Nares' comment out of his mind.

"When will you want to make your first visit?" Pearl asked.

"I'll try O'Keefe, between four o'clock and half past. He usually comes up for tea in the drawing-room."

"I will be there with him," she promised. "But isn't Nares a greater suspect?"

"The best time to make sure he's out of his cabin is during the evenings, when he's either drinking or dancing," Mannering said.

"Tonight it is dancing," Pearl remarked. There wasn't much she missed.

At ten past four Mannering saw her sitting with O'Keefe, who was talking earnestly. Could he have sent those notes? They had seemed much more like notes which Nares would write.

Mannering went out, and down to B Deck, where O'Keefe had one of the deluxe cabins. It was a 'dead' time of day. The Purser's office was not open, and the Indian stewards were off duty. Even the bath-boys were absent. Two young girls, their long legs beautifully tanned, young bosoms beautifully rounded, were talking about what to wear at the dance tonight. Mannering realised that they had noticed him; it would have been better if they hadn't. He turned into the narrow passage leading to O'Keefe's cabin.

He felt completely on a limb. If he were caught, Cross could not possibly overlook it.

Mannering tried the handle of the door; and it was locked.

Now his heart began to beat faster. At sea, few people locked their doors. Had O'Keefe some special reason for doing so? Mannering took a pen-knife out of his pocket, one with a pick-lock blade. It clicked open. Someone walked along the passage – a woman, heels tapping. Mannering hunched his shoulders to lose height, and waited until she passed; he had no idea whether she had noticed him.

He inserted the pick-lock blade. The lock was straightforward, and Mannering had never lost his dexterity in the use of the pick-lock. He felt it catch on the barrel, twisted, and heard the lock click back. He thrust open the door and stepped inside.

He heard a rustle of sound and his heart leapt; but it was a shirt, blowing in the breeze of the electric fan. He closed the door. O'Keefe also kept his inside window up – the one with slats; he meant to make sure no one could get in.

Was it possible that the first attempt would be lucky?

It was a quarter past four; Mannering believed he could rely on another twenty minutes.

He began on the cases. There were seven large and three small. The first three he tried were unlocked and contained clothes and oddments, the fourth was locked. He used the pick-lock, and in a few dexterous movements, had the case ready to open. He thrust the lid back. It was filled with cigarettes, gin, and whisky, presumably bought very cheaply at Gibraltar. Mannering moved each packet of 200 cigarettes and each wrapped bottle, made sure the mask wasn't there, and started again.

He forced one more locked case, threw back the lid, and started at the sight of English currency. After the first shock, he counted; it contained over a thousand pounds in sterling notes and nearly as much in East African, Rhodesian, and South African money. He relocked the case, very thoughtfully. O'Keefe wasn't what he seemed but Mannering's interest was not in this kind of currency fraud. He ran through the drawers, the wardrobe, and everywhere a box containing the mask might be found, but there was nothing.

He listened at the door for a moment, heard no sound, stepped outside and locked the door with the skeleton key.

He stepped into the passage, and no one was about.

A few yards along the passage was Corrison's cabin. Corrison didn't drink tea, but always champed at the bit until the bar was open at five o'clock. Mannering went along to his own cabin, which wasn't locked. He opened the door, and had his second shock, this one much greater. A pair of long, slender, lovely legs were stretched out on his bed; a woman's legs. She was wearing shorts, and a shirt blouse, the top buttons of which were undone. She was smiling at him, her hands behind her head, and the position thrust her bosom forward. Her hair was glossy and dark. She was Naomi Ransom, whom he and Pearl had played in a doubles match of deck tennis.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Mannering."

"Hallo," said Mannering. "Don't you take tea?"

"No more than you do," Naomi Ransom said.

She was a suspect only because she had booked her passage just a day before the ship had sailed, and was not known by the British India Line. She was due to get off at Mombasa, and was officially touring.

"Oh, I hate tea," Mannering said, and leaned over her to press the bell for the steward. She moved her right arm, and held his wrist. It hurt a little from the Gibraltar bruise, but Mannering did not show it.

"I shouldn't," Naomi said. "It isn't proper to entertain a lady in your cabin."

"Oh, ladies are always welcome," Mannering said. "And I'm sure my steward wouldn't be shocked."

"You should be."

"It doesn't happen easily." Mannering moved back from the bed and pulled up a chair. "Apart from compromising yourself, what are you doing here?"

She looked at him from beneath fine dark curling lashes. She was strikingly handsome, but far more important just then, she was superbly

confident.

She smiled very slowly; some would say seductively.

“Shall we say five hundred pounds?”

“That’s a lot of money,” Mannering remarked.

“Not for you.”

“It’s a lot of money for anybody.”

“Not for John Mannering of Quinns.”

He smiled at her amiably.

“I know some of you are expensive, Mrs. Ransom, but aren’t you pricing yourself out of the market?”

“I’m past being insulted,” she said, “and I’m not selling my feminine charms.”

“Then why do you expect to get five hundred pounds?”

“For my silence,” she said.

“Oh,” said Mannering softly. “Blackmail, is it?”

“That’s right,” Naomi Ransom said sweetly.

“What do you think you can blackmail me about?” inquired Mannering.

“Your visit to Ralph O’Keefe’s cabin, with a skeleton key,” she said. “You wouldn’t like to spend the rest of the voyage confined to this room, would you?”

Chapter Ten

BARGAIN

"No," Mannering admitted after a moment's reflection. "It's too hot to live in a cabin for so long."

"I thought you would see reason."

"I don't think five hundred pounds is reason."

"I do," she said.

Mannering smiled amiably.

"But you're wrong," he said. "Get up and get out."

She didn't move.

"Naomi, I don't want to ask you again," Mannering said.

"John, *dear,* you can't bluff me," she retorted.

"Bluff?" he echoed as if intrigued. "We'll see if it's bluff." He took her right wrist, pulled it free, and twisted. She gasped, and sat up, breasts strained forward against the shirt blouse, which was small for her. He twisted again, so that her arm was behind her in a hammer lock.

"Legs off the bed," he ordered.

"You're going to regret this, you know."

He let her wrist go, but before she could do anything he slid one arm beneath her shoulders and one beneath her knees, lifted her off the bed and carried her to the door. He thrust one arm past her, opened the door, thrust her forward and said: "Next time, Naomi, call only by appointment."

She recovered her balance in the little hallway outside his room, and twisted round to look at him. She was breathing rather hard, but smiling. She looked quite magnificent, with her head tossed back and her body thrust forward.

"John," she said, "I'll forgive you just this once."

She went off.

Mannering closed the door and stood by the bed for a few seconds, vaguely aware of the perfume rising from the pillow. He was hot from the exertion; it was much hotter here than he had realised. He had a sip of iced water from a thermos jug, and stepped to the window.

He heard a rustle of movement, just outside.

He thrust himself forward but the window wasn't open wide enough. He pulled it down, and peered out in time to see a pair of blue shoes and bare ankles disappearing round a gangway. He sprang to the door, but before he reached the passage again, it was empty except for a mother and a tiny tot, coming slowly along.

"Good afternoon," the mother said to Mannering. She looked exhausted with the heat.

"Hallo," Mannering beamed at the child. "Did you see anyone coming along here just now?"

"No, I'm afraid I didn't," the woman said. "I've only just come from the ballroom."

"Mummy, come on!" the tot urged.

"I've promised to take her in for a swim," the mother said. "She simply *loves* the water. And she must be hot, poor child."

She hurried past, brushing back her sweat-damp hair.

Mannering went back to his cabin, very thoughtfully. It was bad enough to have been found out; but to think that someone else may have overheard what he and Naomi Ransom had said made the situation ever more delicate if not dangerous.

Where had she been when he had searched O'Keefe's cabin?

Would he have been wiser to talk to her?

He tried to persuade himself that he had proved that he could not easily be intimidated, and that could only be a good thing. He changed into borrowed swimming trunks, took a borrowed towel, and was about to put on the borrowed sandals when he realised that the woman might have left something here. He ran through the drawers and wardrobe, and his two cases. Everything seemed just as he had left it. He was still uneasy when he left his cabin.

Upstairs, the deck was beginning to fill up again. Several people were in the pool, including the mother and tiny tot. He waited for a chance, and dived in cleanly. He came up at the other side of the little pool, next to a blonde whom he did not know well.

"Isn't it lovely?" she asked in a noticeably South African accent.

"Just right," he said.

Then he saw Naomi Ransom, poised on the edge of the pool. Several men by the rails were watching her. She looked quite beautiful as she waited until a spot was clear, and then dived in. She made hardly a splash.

Soon, she was treading water by Mannering's side.

"When can I make that appointment?" she asked.

"Shall we have a drink at seven o'clock in the smoking-room?"

"That sounds more amenable!" Immediately she had spoken she swam away from him.

He got out, towelled gently to avoid sweating too much and ordered a whisky and soda. Pearl was sitting just outside the bar, with Nares.

"Hallo," Mannering said. "So you two know each other."

"We certainly do," Nares said. He winked.

"Have you been swimming?" asked Pearl.

"Just a dip. Now I have to go and play deck tennis," Mannering said. He disappeared into the blazing white sunlight, but did not go to the next deck for the sports; he hurried down to B Deck.

Nares had a small, inside room – the kind of room a man without much money would have. The door was unlocked. Mannering stepped inside, knowing that a bath-boy and a cabin boy had seen him; but three doors led off here.

The room was a shambles. At first, Mannering thought that someone must

have searched here and turned it upside down. Soon he realised that this was normal for Nares. Shirts, trousers, swimsuits, and ties littered the bed, dressing-table, and chairs. Oddments of creams, tanning lotions and pomades cluttered the dressing-table, too; this was more like a woman's room than a man's.

There were only three cases and a brief case. All were unlocked and each except the brief case was empty. He looked through the brief case. Inside were some letters from a tea planter in Nyasaland, confirming the offer of a post of overseer at two thousand pounds a year 'all found'. Earlier letters referred to Nares' lack of experience.

Mannering put these all back.

Nares was obviously hard up or he wouldn't have taken such a job. A man in financial difficulties might do a lot of peculiar things for money.

Mannering opened the only section of the brief case he hadn't yet inspected. He unfolded a letter, and as he ran his eye down it, saw a paragraph which read:

> "You owe over three years' alimony to your ex-wife, and unless you find a substantial sum shortly you will be put into the bankruptcy court by your tailors and your shoemakers.
>
> You must get a job, and I strongly advise you to try to get one out of England. Carole won't be patient forever."

Mannering folded the letter and put it back.

As he always did in such moments he felt as if he were a heel to invade another man's privacy in such a way – even a man like Nares. Then he reminded himself that Nares might easily have been approached to carry that mask, yet there was no sign of it here.

Mannering went back to his cabin and changed. There was the usual flurry of young and old in the passages. He went up to the smoking-room, and the Indian Mehta came across and said: "Oh, Mr. Mannering."

"Hallo." Mannering smiled.

"I believe we have to do battle together."

"Have we?" Mannering didn't know what the man meant: it was almost as if Mehta was challenging him before he, Mannering, searched his room.

"I have just won my round of deck quoits. We are in the semi-finals."

"Oh," said Mannering. "Congratulations. Shall we play tomorrow?"

"Any time you wish."

They settled for ten o'clock. Mannering walked on. A few people, also changed for dinner, were in the smoking-room, but there was no sign of Naomi Ransom. Nares was in the smoking-room, changed, a drink in front of him. He waved.

"Come and have one."

"Another time, thanks," Mannering said.

Then he saw Naomi Ransom.

She was stunningly beautiful in a short cocktail dress, high on one

shoulder, off the other. Her hair was beautifully done, and she wore a single camellia in it, the same red as her dress. She looked as sleek and faultlessly turned out as if she had come from a Paris or Mayfair salon. Every man in sight turned his head. One, a deep-tanned, handsome man was approaching Mannering; he stopped.

Naomi drew near Mannering and touched his hand lightly.

"Hallo."

"You look ravishing."

"Always the gallant."

"Not always, but certainly now."

"Mr. Mannering—" The deep-tanned man was Major Mick Thomas, the chairman of the Sports Committee; young Joslyn was his chief *aide.*

"Hallo, Mick," Naomi said.

"Beautiful as ever, sweetheart," Thomas said. "Come and join my party."

"I think John has designs on me," Naomi said. Her eyes seemed to laugh at Mannering; honey-coloured eyes with beautiful lashes.

"Can't say I blame him," said Thomas. "Er—Mr.—John—would you do me a very great favour?"

"Be careful of him," said Naomi. "He probably wants you to judge the fancy dress competition."

"Don't spike my guns," Thomas protested.

"No, what I would like is you to be the announcer and auctioneer at the race meeting tomorrow night," he went on. "The man who was to do it has got laryngitis. It isn't very much, really."

"It's a hard evening's work," said Naomi. "I've heard all about it."

"You're such a help," said Thomas, reproachfully.

"I'll be glad to," Mannering said.

Thomas's face lit up.

"That's jolly decent of you. Everyone will be delighted. Glad to see Naomi hasn't much influence over you."

He hurried off.

"Where shall we go?" asked Mannering. "This is too public."

"The quietest place is the drawing-room," Naomi said.

"And we must be quiet for blackmail."

"Yes, mustn't we," she said sweetly. They went along, talking idly, to the almost empty drawing-room, took seats out of earshot of anyone else, and ordered gin and French.

"Now to business," said Mannering. "You think you saw me go into O'Keefe's cabin."

"I know I saw you."

"Where were you?"

"In the cabin opposite."

"Yours?"

"Yes. I share it with two other women." She rested a hand on Mannering's arm. "I'm in a generous mood, John."

"How generous?"

"I'll settle for two hundred and fifty pounds."

Mannering laughed.

"Generous is one word. Why do you think I went into O'Keefe's cabin?"

"Don't be really silly," protested Naomi. "He always carries several thousand pounds' worth of cash with him. He buys a lot of goods for hard cash."

"Ah," said Mannering. "And what am I to pay you good money for?"

Naomi said lightly: "When the theft is discovered, I won't say a word."

Mannering smiled gently.

"No deal," he said.

"It could be very unpleasant for you."

"Yes, couldn't it?"

Naomi said: "I can't make up my mind whether you really don't care, or whether you think you're calling a bluff which isn't a bluff."

"You'll find out," Mannering said. "Tell me something."

"What is it?"

"Are you hard up?"

She gave a brittle laugh.

"Yes, I am. Desperately hard up."

"Yet you travel First Class on board."

"I'm not likely to meet anyone with money if I travel Tourist," Naomi pointed out. "Such as you, for instance."

"Would you like to *earn* two hundred and fifty pounds?"

"Mr. Mannering, sir! If you're suggesting that I be yours for the rest of the voyage—"

"Naomi, dear," said Mannering, "let's get one thing quite clear. I have a wife at home, and I like a clear conscience. This is a proposal of work."

She looked puzzled.

"On the ship?"

"Yes."

"I can't imagine what."

"There are five men and two women on board who might have something I want," said Mannering. "O'Keefe's one, Corrison, Mehta, Katman, and Nares."

"Nares," she echoed.

"Don't you like him?"

"He's a whisky-sodden snake."

"How much do you know about him?"

"Quite a lot," she said.

"Will you find out everything you can about him and the other four men?"

"About their love life, do you mean?"

"About their real reasons for coming on the *East Africa Star*. And—" he paused.

"Yes?"

"Whether they've a special hate for me."

“Oh,” said Naomi, leaning back and looking at him through her lashes. “You’re playing detective, are you?”

“Yes.”

“And it’s worth two hundred and fifty pounds?”

“Yes.”

“Tell me more,” said Naomi. “Have some great art treasures been stolen, or anything like that?”

“I’ve told you all I’m going to,” Mannering said. “Will you take the job?”

After a long pause, Naomi Ransom said: “Yes, John. What about the two women?”

Mannering laughed. “Leave them to me.”

“I’ll bet one is the little Malayan or whatever she is,” Naomi said. “She’s the loveliest girl I’ve ever seen. Don’t—” she broke off with a quick smile. “But you’re not on the prowl, are you, in view of that wife of yours?”

“I’m not on that kind of prowl.”

“When shall I report my findings?”

“We can always have a drink together, the romantics will leave us alone if we make it obvious we want to be.”

Naomi laughed.

“I always thought I would like you,” she said.

Chapter Eleven

NIGHT

Mannering lay awake.

They were nearing Port Said and Suez, and he was no further on in the investigation; he still had no idea who had the mask and there were moments, like this, when he wondered whether it was on board.

There was no wind, and the cabin was hot and airless. There was the usual drone of the engine and buzz of the ventilator louvres, and a few people walked along from Tourist. It must be one o'clock.

A girl said with a deep sigh: "Oh, I love you so much."

A man said: "I've never felt like this before."

Mannering heard them with only half his attention.

He had been through every suspect's cabin, and found nothing to help in his search. Naomi had relayed a great deal of information, and so had Pearl. The information tallied in all but minor details. According to Naomi, none of the men showed any animosity towards him, and only Katman claimed to know anything about him beyond what the newspapers said.

The two women he had talked to and whose cabins he had searched seemed to be travelling innocently in every way.

He had been through Naomi's cabin, and found nothing to help.

What should—what could—he do next?

He heard a soft sound at the door; it was probably a rustle of wind, for he felt a slight breeze. Silence fell. He heard another rustle of sound, this time at the window. He was facing it, with his eyes closed. He opened them a fraction, but saw nothing. The ship was moving very slowly, and he guessed they were slowing down for the pilot to take them along the breakwater into Port Said and the entrance to the Canal.

He closed his eyes again – and heard the rustle.

Opening his eyes he saw a dark face, eyes glistening, close to the bed. He saw a glint, as of a knife. He flung himself sideways towards the floor. There was a flurry of movement, a sharp snapping sound, a metallic crack. He felt a warm, oily arm and body. He grabbed, but his fingers slid off the arm. He felt the little creature back away and heard him gasp as if for breath.

"Stop there!" Mannering shouted, hoping to frighten. Padding footsteps sounded on the cabin floor and a dark shape suddenly appeared at the window as the attacker hoisted himself up.

"Stop him!" Mannering bellowed.

He snatched a heavy book from the dressing-table as he straightened up, and hurled it. He heard the assailant cry out, but the book dropped to the floor and head and shoulders appeared against the window.

Outside, someone came running.

Mannering saw the dark shape disappear through the window, heard a

shout followed by a scream.

"*George!*"

Mannering saw the little creature who had attacked him stand on the ship's rail for a moment and then dive in. There was hardly a splash.

"Look at that!" cried a man.

"What a dive!"

"*George!*"

Others came hurrying. By the time Mannering reached the deck a dozen passengers and two English and two Indian members of the crew had gathered, many were chattering, several were pointing. Just visible in the light of the ship was a dark dot of a man or a boy's head.

A youthful officer in white was saying: "Which cabin did he come from?"

"Mine," said Mannering briskly. "I'm going after him. Rescue me, won't you?"

"Mr. Mannering! You can't—"

Wearing only a pair of briefs, Mannering climbed to the rail. A man grabbed him. Someone called: "Don't let him!" He poised for a moment which seemed very long, before diving in. The water was as calm as a swimming pool. He struck the surface, cleft the water, and went under. After another long moment, he surfaced. He could see nothing of the other swimmer, but not far away he could just make out the shape of a boat against the glow in the sky above Port Said. Another ship, lights ablaze, was anchored nearby.

Mannering swam towards the small boat. A searchlight shot out from the *East Africa Star,* a vivid beam which began to sweep the sea. It shone on Mannering and the reflection from the water dazzled him. It passed, and caught the edge of the small boat, lost it, then switched back. A motor-boat with a man in the bows showed up in vivid relief.

Mannering struck out towards it.

The beam travelled along the stretch of water between him and the boat, and stopped. He could just make out a shape which might be a head in the water.

Then he saw a stab of flame coming from the boat. He realised in a flash that the man in the bows was shooting. At him? Fear went through him. He saw two more flashes. The searchlight beam shifted, and for a split second he saw a pair of arms rise out of the water, then they disappeared beneath the surface.

A roaring sound followed. He could make out the wake of the motor-boat which was heading out to sea, not towards the harbour. He felt chilled by what had happened, and turned round, treading water for a moment, then swimming towards the ship. The searchlight shone on him. He thought he heard a shout. A moment later there was a splash in the water near him; a lifebelt. He hardly needed one but swam towards it. When he was near enough to the ship the men on board began to haul him in. Soon, he was able to climb up a rope ladder let down to him.

He could see the crowd and hear the buzz of excitement. A lot of

passengers had been restless in the heat, and came rushing out. Now there would be questions, questions, questions.

Some time later, wearing only shorts and a shirt, he stood with Captain Cross in Cross's cabin. He did not need telling that Cross was in a savage temper which he somehow kept under control.

"Well, Mr. Mannering?"

"There was no other hope of catching the man," Mannering said simply.

"If you had raised the alarm I could have radioed Port Said and had the motor-boat held."

"I doubt it," Mannering said.

Cross seemed to have grown in stature.

"I am *telling* you what would have happened, Mr. Mannering."

"This thing was laid on so well that I doubt if the boat would have gone straight to Port Said," Mannering said, reasonably.

"It would have been apprehended with the man in it. Now there is every reason to believe that the man who attacked you is dead. But for you he would probably be alive."

"Captain Cross," said Mannering, softly, "you know as well as I do that I did the only thing which offered a reasonable chance of catching my attacker." He leaned forward towards a desk, on which was a broken knife – the blade had snapped close to the handle. The knife thrust, meant for him, had hit with such force against the wall that the blade had snapped. "The fact that his accomplice shot him isn't on my conscience and needn't be on yours."

Cross said coldly: "I think we will leave each other's consciences out of this. I have given you all the co-operation I possibly can. You have grossly abused it."

"By diving into the sea tonight?" Mannering began to feel angry in turn.

"This has simply brought the situation to a head. *Nine* of my passengers have complained about their cabins being searched."

"Nine?" echoed Mannering.

"Nine. It must stop, forthwith."

"It must indeed," said Mannering. "Yes. Nine, you say."

"You heard me."

"I certainly did," agreed Mannering, "but—oh, never mind."

"What were you going to say?"

Mannering hesitated, and then said slowly: "I don't think any passenger would know I'd been in his cabin, even if I had."

"You may not be as expert as you appear to think."

Mannering drew his breath in sharply, bit on a sharp retort, and said: "If I've caused you any difficulties or embarrassment, sir, I'm really sorry."

Cross was staring, half-frowning. Then, as if mollified, he said: "I accept that, Mr. Mannering. But it must stop."

Mannering said: "Can I look at the list of complainants?"

Without a word, Cross got up, took a folder from his desk and handed it

to Mannering. He ran his eyes down the list of passengers. O'Keefe was on the list; so was Katman; the rest were only vaguely familiar names.

He looked up.

"None of these have complained because of me. I haven't been in their cabins."

"Are you asking me to believe that?" Cross asked, coldly again.

"Captain Cross," said Mannering, "I haven't lied to you yet and I don't intend to." He picked up a pencil and ticked off the unfamiliar names. "I've no interest at all in any of these people."

"You mean—someone *else* has been in the cabins?"

"Presumably."

"Good God! I took it for granted that it was you."

"Has any of them missed anything?"

"So far nothing has been stolen, but drawers have been opened and wardrobes and suitcases searched." Cross stood up. "I don't like this one bit. I assumed there was nothing to worry about except excessive enthusiasm on your part. I was going to tell you to stop it, because it's beginning to be talked about among the passengers." He looked stunned. "Do you think someone else could be looking for that damned mask?"

"It's possible," Mannering said, although that was the last thing he had expected and certainly the last he wanted. "How much talk has there been?"

"Enough."

"It hasn't reached me," Mannering said. "What time do you expect to tie up?" He saw from the wall clock that it was just after four.

"About six o'clock: the pilot's coming aboard at five. We'll be here until eleven or twelve, when the noon convoy to the East will start through the Canal." Cross was silent for a moment. Then he gave a quick laugh and said: "You've had quite a night. Like a drink?"

"Very much."

"I can manage a whisky and soda," Cross said. "If you hadn't woken up, that boy would have killed you."

"Boy?" echoed Mannering.

"Your description sounds as if it was a boy. They can swim like fishes and dive from great heights. Absolutely fearless." Cross had his back to Mannering, pouring out the drinks. "You were a bloody fool to dive off the ship, but a lot of George Medals have been handed out for the same kind of thing." He turned as he spoke. "Cheers."

Mannering drank.

"Cheers."

"What made you think it was worth it?"

"If I'd caught him he would have talked."

"About who had put him up to it, eh? Yes, possibly. But he would have named the boatman and the boatman would have named someone else, and by the time you'd started talking to the police the ship would have sailed."

Mannering said: "It was worth trying."

"Answer me a question, Mannering, will you?"

“Yes.”

“What’s in this for you?”

Mannering said: “I don’t know that there’s anything. Possibly a profit if I negotiated a sale for all the Crown Jewels of Sumi, but that’s not certain.”

“Then why risk your life?”

“Mine is threatened, Pearl Toji’s is threatened,” Mannering pointed out simply.

Cross deliberated.

“I see,” he said at last. “I suppose the truth is I don’t really understand you but I admire your courage if not your good sense. Do something for me, will you?”

“If I can.”

“Find out who is searching these cabins.”

“If I get any indication at all, I’ll tell you,” Mannering promised. “What have you done so far?”

“Reported that a motor-boat brought a thief near and the ship was boarded,” answered Cross. “The Egyptian police will assume that it was a particularly daring attempt at burglary.”

“That’s all?”

“Yes,” said Cross. “We don’t know for certain that the swimmer was shot and killed. They’re tough, these Egyptian teenagers, and your chap may have been older than you think. If I’d reported the attempted knifing it would hold the ship up a long time. Days, possibly. These Egyptians co-operate very well these days but they would want to get their teeth into this one.”

Cross hesitated, and then demanded: “Do you want the attack reported, Mannering? If you insist, it will be done.”

Chapter Twelve

PORT SAID

Mannering said with a faint smile: “I’d rather it wasn’t reported.”

“I thought you’d say that,” said Cross. “I hope it’s the best thing to do. Going ashore?”

“Yes,” Mannering said. “Yes, I think so. Two passengers get off here according to the passenger list.”

“Four get on,” Cross told him. “Do you want us to try to check what is taken off the ship? We can’t do here what we did at Gib, you know. The police will want the whole story before they’ll co-operate.”

“If the man with the mask wanted to get it ashore at Port Said he wouldn’t have gone to all this trouble to get me,” Mannering reasoned. “He must have written from Gibraltar, or sent a coded cablegram, or one of his agents might have—”

“Come aboard when we slowed down,” Cross said. “It can be done all right and it’s quite easy after dark. The disquieting thing, surely, is that your man could call on someone in Port Said and lay this on. Are you sure that *only* this Mask of Sumi is involved, Mannering?”

“As far as I know,” Mannering said cautiously.

Cross’s expression seemed to say: “You may not know very much.” Aloud, he said: “No one would go to these lengths for jewels worth twenty-five thousand pounds, surely.”

“It’s a thought,” Mannering said. “Is there any word from Tourist?”

“Except for three young couples, two girls and four young men all going out for short-term appointments in the Civil Services or the schools, we know them all,” Cross said. “They’re all fairly regular travellers, and all live in East Africa. Most Tourist passengers are simply anxious to get to their destination as quickly as possible, without frills. We seldom have any odd men out down there.”

Mannering had to be satisfied with that assessment.

Very soon, he also had to accept a great deal of comment, much of it fulsome, about his night dive.

“John, dear,” Naomi said with refreshing matter-of-factness, “don’t drown yourself before you’ve paid me for my honest toil, will you?”

Mannering laughed.

“John!” Pearl said, coming up to him on deck. “Why did you do that last night? I have only just heard.”

“I thought it might bring the affair to a head quickly,” Mannering answered.

“It might have led to your death!” She looked and sounded deeply concerned. “Please don’t take such chances again. It is not worth it.”

“Do you really mean there is a limit to what it’s worth?”

“Yes,” Pearl said. She leaned against the ship’s rail, looking at him. A faint reflection from the deep blue sea travelled across her eyes, and seemed to give her expression an even greater intensity. “Every time someone else is endangered I wish I had not come.”

Mannering didn’t speak.

“It is said that the man who attacked you was killed. Is that so?” Pearl asked.

“I think so.”

Pearl looked almost unbelievably lovely as she went on: “John, you were attacked at Gibraltar, and when coming on the ship. Now it has happened again. Every step you take seems to threaten danger. Three people have died already. I think we should give up, here.”

“In Port Said?”

“We could wait for a ship going back, or we could go to Cairo and fly to England.”

“Leaving the mask,” Mannering said very slowly.

“Yes,” Pearl said. Her fingers were light and cool on his arm. “John, why should you risk your life again for my father? You knew him so little. For the mask? You know nothing about the Asri Dynasty. It can mean nothing to you. Give up, John, please.”

He didn’t speak. The pressure of Pearl’s fingers on his arm became greater.

“John, please go back to London, to Lorna. Forget this terrible affair.”

Mannering said slowly: “I’ll think about it.”

“You will, won’t you?”

“Very seriously,” Mannering promised.

“Pearl!” Thomas came up, brisk as always. “They’re waiting for you in the semi-finals of the women’s quoits. Can you play now?”

“Of course,” Pearl said.

She hurried off, Mannering watching her. Thomas stood by Mannering’s side.

“How well do you know her, John?”

“I knew her father better.”

“Think she can look after herself?”

“Why?”

“Katman is setting his cap at her,” said Thomas. “So is Nares. Wouldn’t trust either of them with my daughter without a chastity belt.” He looked shrewdly at Mannering.

“None of my business, I suppose, but I’d hate anything to happen to a girl like that.”

“So would I,” said Mannering feelingly.

“I felt sure you would. That’s why I thought I’d mention it. Er—anything I can do to help you in the other business?”

Mannering echoed blankly: “Other business?”

“My dear chap!” said Thomas. “Three attempts on your life aren’t coincidental. There are a lot of us would like to lend a hand, if there’s

anything we can usefully do. It was discussed at the Sports Committee meeting this morning: your high dive won you quite a reputation. Friend Joslyn can't stop talking about you."

Mannering exclaimed: "Well, well."

Thomas grinned. "We're not all blind, John!"

"Obviously not. Then there is one thing you can do."

"Name it."

"Watch Pearl wherever she goes on land."

"Ah. Is she in physical danger, too?"

"She could be," said Mannering. "Tell only Kenyans or people you know."

"It shall be done," said Thomas. "How will it help you?"

"It will leave me free for other jobs."

"Don't forget that if you want strong-arm help—"

"I won't forget," Mannering promised him.

"Is Pearl going ashore?"

"Yes. She hasn't been to Port Said before."

Thomas said: "We'll see she doesn't come to any harm. Don't you worry." He went off, obviously delighted, leaving Mannering very thoughtful.

Soon they began to move slowly along the Channel towards Port Said harbour. As they came alongside, and were moored to the huge buoys, a dozen boats gay and riotous with colour, pulled close to them. Men in the boats packed with leather goods and carpets, sandals and cottons, began to bellow their wares. Every game stopped as passengers crowded towards the side. The big floating bridge was slowly extended and pushed towards the ship but before then goods were being hauled on board, passengers were shouting their offers.

Mannering watched for a few minutes, saw Pearl with Katman and two others – active men on the Sports Committee. Nares wasn't there. He went down to his cabin. His cabin steward said: "Don't forget lock door, sahib."

"I'll remember."

"Very small boy easily get in window."

"Don't I know it!" Mannering said.

He went inside.

He knew at once that this chaos wasn't just Nares' untidiness. A drawer jutted out an inch, clothes hung in the wrong places, books on the dressing-table were displaced.

He remembered Cross's story of the nine passengers whose cabins had been visited.

"Now I wonder what they're after," Mannering said. He opened a drawer where he kept his ready money. The money, wrapped in a handkerchief, was still there. Suddenly, he frowned.

Two small brown paper packets were in the drawer, packets which he had never seen before. They were about the size of a flat fifty cigarette box, and sealed thoroughly with Sellotape. He began to pick up the tape with his fingernail.

He heard footsteps outside, half-turned, and saw Naomi. She looked alarmed, much of her usual poise gone.

"John, are you in trouble?"

"I often am. What makes you think so?"

"I heard two Egyptian policemen who came on board saying that their first job was to see you."

"*What?*"

"I speak Egyptian," Naomi said quickly. "I'm quite sure. And they obviously suspect you of smuggling."

"Smuggling what?"

"I don't know." Naomi stared at the packet in his hand. "What's that?" Her voice sharpened.

Mannering said: "I found it in my drawer."

"My God!" she exclaimed. "That's how they pack hashish. If the police find that in your possession—"

She broke off as if horrified.

Mannering knew only too well what would happen. An Englishman caught in an Egyptian port with a fortune in hashish would be a sensational propaganda gift to the Egyptian Government. They would take him ashore and hold him for questioning and would not release him until the last ounce of publicity value had been wrung out of the situation. The "New Egypt" going all out to stop the traffic in drugs, the decadent Englishman making a fortune out of human misery.

All this flashed through his mind as he opened drawer after drawer and found nothing more.

"John—" Naomi began.

"I've a chance of dropping this into the harbour," Mannering said. He opened the window and saw the impassive face of a moustached Egyptian just outside.

Footsteps sounded in the passage.

Naomi said swiftly: "Give them to me." She snatched the packets, and thrust them down the neck of her sundress. "You go out."

"I can't let you—"

"Don't be a fool!" she said urgently. "Go out!" She pushed him towards the door.

Mannering went out. If there was any risk to her he could tell the truth, so she was in no danger. He need not worry on that score.

He stepped into the passage. Lister, the Master-at-Arms, was coming towards him, with two tall, handsome policemen. Lister stopped. His expression made it all too clear that he was alarmed.

"Oh, Mr. Mannering."

"Hallo," said Mannering. "What time are we likely to get ashore?"

"You are Mr. Mannering," the older of the two officers said.

"That's right," Mannering beamed. "Can I help you?"

"Mr. Mannering, we have been told that you carry contraband," the officer said.

"Oh, nonsense!"

"We must please search your cabin."

"Search—" Mannering drew himself up and turned to the Master-at-Arms. "Can't you stop this nonsense?"

"I'm afraid it isn't nonsense, Mr. Mannering."

"Then I must see Captain Cross."

"That's not possible. He is deeply involved with—"

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Mannering again. "I insist." He thrust himself forward, and the two officers barred his path. "This is outrageous!"

"Mr. Mannering, please!"

Mannering swung round and rushed in the other direction. The policemen cried out, Lister shouted: "Mannering! Don't be a fool!"

Mannering turned to the Tourist promenade deck and heard heavy footsteps thumping behind him. He reached the deck. To the right was his cabin with the man outside it; to the left was an empty deck. He turned left and raced along, the others after him.

As he reached the Tourist swimming pool, passing a doorway on his right, he saw a man's leg stretched out in front of him. He kicked against it and pitched forward. As he crashed on to the deck he saw a man's back as the man climbed a flight of stairs towards the main promenade deck.

"Of course there's nothing in my cabin," Mannering said. "It's a trumped-up charge, and you of all people should know it."

Captain Cross said coldly: "If you had co-operated with the Egyptian police you would have saved yourself a lot of time and us a lot of trouble."

"I simply wanted to see you," Mannering said. He looked at the two Egyptian policemen. "Are you satisfied?"

"We offer our apologies," the spokesman said. "Our information was from a most reliable source, and we have much trouble with drug smuggling. You are free to go ashore if you wish, Mr. Mannering."

Mannering said: "Thank you."

"Captain Cross," went on the policeman, "I regret that it is necessary to search your ship. Our information that there is contraband on board came from a most reliable source."

For the first time, Mannering saw Cross put out of countenance.

"Search my ship. You *can't* be serious."

"I am very serious indeed," said the Egyptian.

Tight-lipped, and restraining his anger with a great effort, Cross had a loud-speaker announcement made, and ordered his crew to co-operate. Mannering took his first chance to call Lister aside.

"How well do you know the police here?" he asked.

"Well enough. Why?" asked Lister suspiciously.

"They could keep their eyes open for the mask," Mannering said. "I could telephone the Yard and ask them to phone Port Said or Cairo, if it comes to that."

"I'll see what I can do," promised Lister.

For four hours in the torrid heat passengers stayed on board while the search was made. Every cabin and every part of the ship was searched with a thoroughness which told Mannering how certain the police were that they would find what they were after. Mannering waited, with a sense of anti-climax, until Lister came up to him.

"Mannering."

"Any luck?"

"They've found a stack of Egyptian currency in O'Keefe's cabin – he obviously had a black market deal on. They've confiscated the money but O'Keefe's staying on board, thanks to Captain Cross's pleading. And Nares has been held on shore," added Lister in a tone of suppressed excitement. "He was one of the few who got off before the ship was searched – for smuggling watches in. Bloody fool – he'll be in an Egyptian jail for a long time. They've just finished. I think they turned up something which will interest you."

"The mask?" exclaimed Mannering eagerly.

"It was found hidden behind some crates in the hold," Lister said. "The Captain has it now."

It was the Mask of Sumi. Mannering had no doubt about that. But the jewels were missing. They had been forced out of their settings, and the mask was just a misshapen piece of battered metal.

"So the jewels are loose," Cross said. "And we've no way of being sure whether they're on the ship."

"There's no way of being sure they aren't," Mannering retorted.

Cross said: "I have just had instructions from my head office to give you what assistance I can. But there will be limits. I suppose I can't blame you for losing the noon convoy through the Canal, but it wouldn't surprise me if the affair you're working on had something to do with it. We have lost half a day. That costs money."

"I know," said Mannering humbly. "But someone could have been giving Nares or O'Keefe away, you know. Er—how about shore leave?"

"No point in staying aboard – we won't sail until eleven o'clock at the earliest," Cross said.

Chapter Thirteen

SPECIAL EXHIBITION

Mannering was still shaken by the narrowness of his escape. If he had reached his cabin ten minutes later the packets would have been found. He felt tense and on edge because he did not know whether Naomi had got away with it. The discovery of the mask gave him a sick feeling of failure, too.

Lister was on B Deck.

"Everything all right, Mr. Mannering?"

"As good as it can be in the circumstances, I suppose," Mannering said.

"No ill feelings?"

Mannering had to laugh.

"No. How do I get off?"

"Hand your passport to these gentlemen and they'll give you a receipt." Two Customs officials stood a few yards away. "We sail at 11 o'clock – 10.30 is the latest time for return."

"Has Miss Toji gone ashore?"

"If her key's on the board—" Lister turned towards a key-board.

"I saw her go off with a party including Sir Harry Katman and Mr. Nares," a junior Purser volunteered.

"Mrs. Ransom?"

"I *think* she went off, sir. Her key's on the board," he confirmed a moment later, and Mannering felt the stirring of relief.

"Do you know Port Said?" Lister asked.

"I knew it during the war."

"You won't find it changed much," Lister said. "They've done a bit of rebuilding since Suez and tidied things up a bit. But you still have to be careful. You more than anyone else today."

"I'll be careful," Mannering said.

He strolled over the floating bridge, past the boats where eager-voiced and bright-eyed men shouted their wares. Men in long robes came up to him, carrying leather coshes, shoehorns, albums.

"French portrait, sir?"

"Feelthy postcard."

Mannering walked past, smiling a set smile but not speaking. He had been more shaken by the attempt to frame him than by the attacks on his life and the useless mask. He was worried, too, about Pearl – but Thomas's men would be looking after her.

What about Naomi?

She was having a disturbing effect on him. Her tall, almost languid figure and her beauty would appeal to most men but she had something else – a kind of attitude of mind, a superb poise and the ability to think on the

instant and to act on her thoughts.

She seemed too able a woman to be living on her wits.

Was she?

Or had she lied to him?

He reminded himself that he hadn't seen inside those brown paper packets, and that she had appeared to recognise them on sight.

Had they contained hashish? If so, how was it that Naomi had been able to recognise it?

Mannering ignored a bare-footed boy trying to sell him roses, and reached the gate leading out of the docks. No one took any notice of him. He saw two small boys and a man obviously twice their age but not much larger in body. Someone like that had come to knife him, and was now dead, floating unseen in the harbour.

He went along the main street. Here, it was not unlike a European city except that there were very few cars. Small boys came up, their hands outstretched, but they ran at the sight of a policeman. The inside of the shops seemed dark and cool.

A man in a long robe with an aristocratic face stepped in front of him.

"Special exhibition for English gentleman," he offered.

"No," said Mannering.

"Beautiful girls, very clever, big bellies."

"No." Mannering stepped to one side.

"Very special Oriental lady," the man said. "From Bangkok."

Mannering missed a step, but his heart began to thump. He had to shoulder the man aside so as to pass; he needed a few moments to collect his thoughts. Then a car turned the corner, a big black American model. A man was leaning out of the window; Joslyn.

"Mannering!"

Mannering stopped and the car slowed down.

"Mannering," Joslyn gasped as he got out of the cab, "Thomas has laid on a search for you. Pearl's disappeared."

Mannering's heart seemed to turn over.

"We were in a mosque, first place we stopped," Joslyn went on. "Everyone thought she was with us. Thomas was keeping a special eye open for her when some shoeshine boy pestered him. Pearl must have slipped away then."

Mannering said: "Where is Thomas?"

"He's got three cabs – he's out in one and there's this one and another, all on the look-out."

"Note the name of this street and the robe that chap's wearing," Mannering said. "And in ten or fifteen minutes try to be back here with Thomas and anyone else who will take a chance."

"A chance of what?"

"A knife in his back."

"They'll all come," Joslyn said. "How about you?"

Mannering said in a louder voice: "I'm all right. You get back to the ship

and report that Pearl's missing."

He winked.

Joslyn glanced at the Arab, and said: "I get you. Be careful."

Mannering waited until the taxi had gone, and turned back to the Egyptian.

"Where is the Oriental girl?"

"English gentleman come with me, please." The man turned to one of the doorways, and Mannering thought: "Thomas's chaps won't have any trouble finding this." It was dark and cool. He followed the man along a narrow passage, and then through a doorway into another street.

"What's this?" Mannering demanded.

"Special exhibition with Oriental lady in different place near Gibson Market," the man said. "Car waiting."

It was another of the big old American cars: a Buick. A driver was at the wheel. Mannering hesitated, then got in at the back. The man who had led him here stayed on the pavement. Mannering leaned back in the sweltering heat of the car, with the sun already burning hot.

The car went rattling along, hooting at every corner and at everyone who stepped off the pavement. The streets were crowded. Fruit sellers were serving boys and women, some wearing short-sleeved, knee-length dresses, some wearing black, with their yashmaks showing only their eyes. The stench from some side streets was revolting.

Mannering gave up trying to see where they were going. The vital factor seemed to be that they were taking so much trouble that it was unlikely they planned to kill him.

The car swung round a corner, horn blaring, and jolted to a standstill. The driver got out and opened Mannering's door.

"This way, please."

The stench of rotting vegetables and a heap of putrefied meat from tiny shops almost made Mannering sick.

Half-a-dozen small boys were kicking at a rotting melon. A silent row of women in black which covered them from head to foot, showing only their eyes, sat on the kerb by a bus stop.

There was a narrow turning between tall, narrow houses, which looked as if the walls would cave in. The windows were shuttered, the pathway of bare earth trodden by countless feet to an uneven, concrete-like hardness. Mannering's guide led him along here. It seemed a perfect place for murder, but such a trail would be too easy for the police to follow.

The man pushed open a door studded with brass which hadn't been cleaned for years, and edged with intricate carving which had dried out to a drab browny-grey. Mannering, heart in mouth, stepped inside. The cool, dark passage beyond was clean and fresh-smelling. An archway led into a small courtyard where a fountain played, the water crystal clear. No one was here but it was blessedly cool.

The man led him through another archway, and into a high ceilinged room. Along one wall was a couch, and on the couch lay Pearl.

She was wearing a simple yellow dress, with three-quarter sleeves and a split skirt. She lay at full length on her back, her hands by her sides. She wore no shoes. Mannering went slowly towards her, and stared down. It was a long time before he could be absolutely sure that her bosom was rising and falling.

Mannering looked round for the guide, but he had gone.

The room was beautifully cool, barely furnished, with a Persian carpet in the middle, of rich but subdued colours.

Mannering knelt on one knee beside the girl.

"Pearl," he whispered.

She did not stir.

"Pearl!" He raised his voice, but she did not stir.

He took her arm and raised it.

"Pearl, wake up!"

Her arm was limp.

He shook her shoulder vigorously.

"Pearl, you must wake up!"

A man said from behind him:"She is sleeping too deeply, Mr. Mannering."

Mannering stood up and turned round slowly. A small man wearing a red fez but dressed in a pale brown Western suit which was perfectly tailored, was standing in the arched doorway. He had a droll Punch-like face, the full lips turned down at the corners, and heavy eyelids looked so weighed down by wrinkled flesh that he could not open his eyes fully. Even half-closed, they seemed enormous.

"You mean she is drugged," Mannering said.

The man spread his arms.

"That is so."

"Who drugged her?"

"I did."

"Kidnapping and administering drugs," Mannering said. "The police will like that."

"Mr. Mannering, even in the New Egypt there are ways to satisfy the police."

"Not for long," Mannering said.

"For long enough," declared the small man.

"Mr. Mannering, you have caused a great deal of trouble, and you have been very lucky. Your luck cannot last forever."

"But the trouble I cause might last for long enough," said Mannering tartly.

"I doubt that very much. However, I am here to make an arrangement with you – a sensible arrangement by which there need be no more trouble."

"I don't think I want to come to an arrangement with you."

"For that young woman's sake you would be wise to listen," the man insisted. "It is very simple. Take her back to England, Mr. Mannering. The *Himalaya* of the P&O line is in the Canal now and will be calling here to take

on water. There is ample accommodation on her for you and Miss Toji. Take her on it and forget the Mask of Sumi and the other jewels. That is all I ask."

Mannering said: "I don't think we can work together."

"I do not understand you."

"I don't react well to threats at the best of times," Mannering said. "And I don't like being attacked and being framed without making the bad man pay for his sins."

"The attacks would have saved us much trouble had one of them been successful," the man said bluntly. "However, we are discussing the situation as it is now. I will give you your ticket, two hundred and fifty pounds for your expenses on board, and promise you a safe return to England. They are very attractive terms, Mr. Mannering, and should enable you to swallow your pride."

"Yes, shouldn't they?" Mannering conceded.

If this man really meant what he said, and there was no reason to doubt it, he was saying that the jewels were still aboard the *East Africa Star*. Mannering's mind began to work quickly. He could accept the offer, take Pearl on the *Himalaya*, and fly on to Aden to rejoin the *East Africa Star* there. There should just be time. Or he could pretend to accept the offer, but he did not think this little man would be easily deceived.

He said: "No thanks."

"Mr. Mannering, she is a very lovely young woman."

Something in the tone carried menace. So did the glance he gave to Pearl. Mannering looked towards her. The word which came to his mind was *virginal*.

"Don't harm her," Mannering said levelly.

"You have her future in your hands," the Egyptian declared. "You know the North African coast, I am sure. You know what distractions sailors and tourists need. You know how quickly a beautiful young woman can age in such circumstances."

Mannering's fists were clenching.

There was something unspeakably evil in the implication of what this man was saying; it was like a spit of malevolence coming out of a bygone age. Mannering could have broken his neck.

The man went on: "Don't be rash, Mr. Mannering. You would never live to get back to the *East Africa Star* if you attacked me. Look towards your right."

Mannering said: "You won't kill me now, or you wouldn't have gone to this trouble to get me here."

"Don't deceive yourself," the Egyptian said softly. "Don't lay a hand upon me, Mannering. If it is necessary I will kill you."

Alarm rang in his voice, and he shot a glance towards his left. Mannering saw another man standing there, an Arab in a long pearl-grey robe, with his right hand raised and a knife in it.

Mannering said: "You've forgotten the age we live in." Yet he felt both frustration and fear. All he knew was that he must not give way to threats,

that he must conquer his own fear. He turned his back on both men and went to Pearl. He thought her eyes flickered as he bent over her.

"Mannering!" The small man called.

Mannering said: "I'm going to take her back to the ship." He thrust an arm beneath her knees and another beneath her shoulders, and lifted her. He swung round. "Get out of the way."

"Mannering!"

Mannering said: "I'm going to take her back to the *Africa Star* until we find the mask and everything connected with it. Get out of the way."

Over the small man's head he could see the Arab, a strangely immobile figure with the knife in his hand, eagerly awaiting the order to attack. The small man backed away. His voice rose, and became shrill. He looked more like Punch than ever.

"Mannering, I give you one more chance to put her down and do what I say."

Mannering said: "And I give you one more chance to get out of my way."

He did not know what would happen if he thrust himself any further forward. He was acting blindly, and at the back of his mind was the fear that he was acting like a fool, and asking for trouble. But he could not back down now.

For what seemed an age he stood with the girl in his arms and the little man in front of him, and as he stared into the brown eyes he told himself that he had misjudged this man, that he would have no chance to get away.

Then the silence was broken and the tension heightened by a reedy piping sound.

The little man and the Arab swung round. The reedy piping with its eerie note sounded again; it seemed to hold a note of urgency, almost of desperation.

Chapter Fourteen

SEARCH

Mannering heard the Punch-like man speak in sharp, staccato sentences. The Arab turned round, and sped away, long robe rustling. There were other voices, and one of them sounded English. Mannering, with Pearl still in his arms, said quietly: "It isn't working out, is it?"

The man said: "Mannering, if you send for the police it will be one of your great mistakes."

"Really?" said Mannering. He heard footsteps, and then almost unbelievably Thomas's deep voice along the passage: "I know he came here. Don't try to fool me.

"No, mister, I swear to you—"

"Hi! Mick!" called Mannering. "This way."

"There you are!" Thomas's voice sounded much nearer, and a moment later he came into the room. "Hi, John! I—God!"

He had seen Pearl.

Mannering almost laughed, because his expression was so comic.

"Is she all right? If she isn't I'll break this so-and-so's neck," Thomas said harshly.

"She's all right, Mick," Mannering assured him. "Pulse a bit slow because she was given knock-out drops, I would say. How many of you are here?"

"Six," answered Thomas. "What do you want us to do?"

"Take Pearl back to the ship."

"That's easy. What about Kassim?"

"Kassim?"

"Your host," said Thomas sarcastically. "Colonel Akbar Kassim. Didn't you know who he was?"

"No," Mannering admitted. "Should I?"

He glanced to the spot where the little man had been; but no one was there. He had moved as silently as his men. Two more of the *East Africa Star* Sports Committee came in and took Pearl off, carrying her as if she were fragile.

"It depends on your knowledge of the Middle East," said Thomas. "I was here during the war. Kassim ran a kind of exotic ENSA entertainment for the troops plus anything going. He passed us a lot of useful information, that's the only reason no one cut his throat. Made a fortune, partly from that, partly from smuggling and any dirty racket he could handle. Now he runs half the night spots in the Middle East, outside of Israel, and I wouldn't be too surprised to hear that he had one in Tel Aviv."

"Could he get away with that?" asked Mannering.

"He can get away with anything. If things had gone wrong here today he would have produced a dozen witnesses to say it was your fault. Only one

trouble with Akbar Kassim."

"What's that?"

"Physical cowardice," said Thomas. "Offer him violence and he caves in. He isn't used to it. Mind if I offer some advice?"

"Not at all," Mannering said humbly. "Go ahead."

He felt humble. Brown-faced, ever-brash, Major Thomas, good sort and everyone's friend on the *East Africa Star*, had grown ten feet tall in the last few minutes; obviously he knew exactly what he was talking about.

"Don't try to pin anything on Kassim," advised Thomas. "It will get you so involved in Egyptian red tape that you'll never get back on the *East Africa Star*."

"I'll take your advice," Mannering said, still humbly. "Can you get Pearl aboard without raising an alarm?"

"Easy. I'll say she's passed out from heat. It doesn't often happen before we reach the Red Sea, but it's not unheard of."

"Thanks," said Mannering warmly. "I'll be on board before the ship sails."

"Aren't you coming with us?"

"I've a little job to do first."

Thomas looked at him straightly, his grey eyes very clear bright against his dark tan.

"John," he said, "I know what a hell of a chance you took last night, and again this morning. I know you're a lone wolf type, you'd be surprised how much all the ship knows about you by now. But Port Said is no place for lone wolfing or romantic heroes or anything but straightforward common sense. Forgive my bluntness."

"It's refreshing," said Mannering.

"What do you plan to do?"

"I'll tell you later."

"You'll be a fool if you don't tell me now," Thomas said.

He was probably right, but there was a growing question mark in Mannering's mind. Thomas might be ten feet tall, but why had he had Mannering followed? Why had he advised against a complaint about Kassim to the police? Why was he so anxious to know what Mannering planned to do?

"Mick," Mannering said, "in this kind of shindy I've been a fool too often to stop now. There's one thing you can do for me."

"What's that?"

"Check if Naomi Ransom's all right."

"Can do, will do. Don't blame me if you end up in the harbour with your throat cut, will you?"

Mannering laughed.

Thomas said stonily: "Believe it or not, that wasn't meant as a joke."

He went out.

Mannering waited until he had gone, then looked about this room. It was not easy to push Thomas's warning to the back of his mind, but gradually it faded.

There was a beautifully carved desk with brass and silverwork, leather chairs, big leather pouffes. The couch on which Pearl had been lying was covered with a tapestry pattern silk, rich and beautiful. There were three arched windows all fitted with stained-glass which would have beautified any cathedral.

No one seemed near; and there was no sound.

Mannering went to the desk.

He took his pen-knife out, opened the skeleton key blade, and inserted it. He had no doubt at all that he was being watched. He opened the middle drawer without difficulty; inside were a few papers, all in Arabic writing. He put these aside and opened the side drawers. One after another was filled with records, some kept in English. Enough was in English to tell him that these were reports from Kassim's clubs in various parts of the Middle East.

He opened the last drawer and found a file of papers. He took it out and opened it. There in front of him was a full-size coloured plate of the Mask of Sumi.

He looked at the letters, all in English, all signed by James Harding, from his Chelsea address. They had been sent by air. They simply reported that a passenger on the *East Africa Star* would have this mask and might call on Kassim for help.

> "If this should be necessary, please provide all assistance. I will accept your charges as usual."

Mannering's heart began to thump, for this could mean so much. He took the colour plate and folded it once, then put it in his pocket. He was more than ever conscious of being watched; there might be spy-holes in a dozen places in the walls, or even at the stained-glass windows.

He closed the desk and relocked it. He went along the passage by which he had come. By an open doorway he heard a rustle of movement. He paused, close to the wall, but there was no threat of an attack. He went on, walking slowly and deliberately, expecting a challenge.

He heard another rustle of movement by an archway.

"Colonel Kassim!" he called.

There was no answer.

"Colonel Kassim!"

There was still no answer.

Mannering said in a very clear voice: "We can talk now or when I get back to the ship. I will telephone Scotland Yard and have them ask your police why you are interested in the Mask of Sumi."

No one moved.

He went on, acutely conscious of those watching eyes. Only one thing stood between him and death. Kassim's fear of what would happen if Mannering did not get back to the ship. As he went near the huge door, as beautifully preserved as it was carved on the inside, he was keyed up to a pitch of almost screaming tension.

A man called: “A moment, sir, if you please.”

Mannering stopped and looked round. It was the robed Arab who had brought him here.

“Colonel Kassim would like you to ride with him back to the ship.”

“All right. But I’m in a hurry.”

“Thank you, sir. A moment, please.” They waited in the shadowy hall until brisk footsteps sounded and Kassim appeared, looking unperturbed as well as immaculate.

“Thank you for waiting, Mr. Mannering. My car is coming.” The Arab opened this door and a new Cadillac stood outside, a shining monster against the squalor of the street. Across the street a dozen small boys stood admiring but none ventured across for backsheesh. An old man squatted by a pile of rotting water-melons, two youths sat outside the butcher’s shop which was alive with flies.

The Arab opened the door.

“After you, Mr. Mannering—” They sat inside. “I understand that you wish to discuss some matter with me.”

“The Mask of Sumi,” Mannering said. There was no need to let this man know that the shell of the mask had been discovered.

“I understand. You found the description and some letters from my old friend Mr. Harding in my desk.”

“That’s right.”

“Had it been possible to help Mr. Harding I would gladly have done so. The need has not arisen.”

“Was it Harding who paid you to try to kill me?”

“You shock me, Mr. Mannering.”

Mannering said grimly: “I am not working for the police, and I don’t have to report everything to Scotland Yard. But I can if I want to. All the lying witnesses in the world won’t help if your Government is convinced that you are betraying Egypt.”

“I do nothing of the kind.” Kassim was indignant. “I do not understand you.”

“Colonel,” Mannering said, “you are not the only one who can bribe witnesses. If I have to lodge a complaint against you it will be a great nuisance and take up much time. I don’t want that. But I mean to know who paid you to try to kill me, and who told you to change your mind and try to persuade me to leave the *East Africa Star*. It wasn’t Harding.”

“How can you say that?”

“He hasn’t got that kind of money. Who was it?”

Colonel Kassim spread his hands.

“You have been mistaken, Mr. Mannering. No one tried to kill you. I tried only to persuade you to go back to England with the very lovely girl. You understand I would not have harmed her in any way.” Kassim shot Mannering a glance from under his lashes. “I said what I did only to try to persuade you to take her away.”

“Who paid you to do that?”

Kassim spread his hands again.

"Would you betray a friend, Mr. Mannering?"

Mannering said: "When did you receive the instructions?"

"Only yesterday, or I would not have improvised so clumsy a method."

"What time did the cable from the ship reach you?"

"Mr. Mannering, I did not say the cable came from the ship. You must not put words into my mouth." Kassim looked out of the window, as if nervously. "Why must you insist on asking questions which I cannot answer? I cannot tell you what you wish to know."

"You can, you know," said Mannering. "If you don't we'll go on board the *East Africa Star* together and you can explain to Captain Cross why you sent the thief to my cabin this morning, why you put drugs in my cabin and told the police I was smuggling them, and why you kidnapped Miss Toji. We're very near the docks," Mannering went on softly. "You haven't much time."

Kassim drew a deep breath, and then said: "You are a hard man."

"Just tell me who it was."

"It was Naomi Ransom," Kassim said. "But be sure of this, she did not do it for herself. Someone paid her. She is not wealthy, but she represents very wealthy interests."

Mannering evaded most of the itinerant sellers, running a kind of gauntlet of leather goods, watches, dirty postcards, fly whisks and sandals thrust in front of him. Two passengers on the promenade deck were haggling over a carpet.

"Ten pounds, mister, dirt cheap," the Arab was saying.

"It's barefaced robbery. I'll give you five."

"No, mister, five not enough money. Eight pounds ten, mister."

"*He's coming down,*" the haggler whispered in satisfaction to his plump wife. In a louder voice: "Five pounds, that's my limit."

"They always cheat you," a man said to Mannering.

"Do they?" Mannering pushed past a knot of Kenya farmers busy in their interminable argument about the future of their country.

"I tell you the wogs will kick us out the minute they can."

"And I tell you if you keep calling them wogs you deserve to be kicked out."

Mannering went down to his cabin, unlocked the door, and checked that no one had been here. He sat back for five minutes, going over everything that had happened, needing a rest and trying to empty his mind completely. So much had happened that there was only a confusion of impressions in his mind. As he smoked a cigarette, some kind of order began to take shape. Someone, or something, had frightened Kassim or he would never have permitted that search. Had it been Thomas? Had it been physical fear under threat from Thomas?

There was no way of answering that question now. It was far less important than the next: had Kassim lied about Naomi Ransom?

Mannering was surprised at the fervour of his hope that he had, but –

why lie? Simply to put Mannering on the wrong track?

He let this and other thoughts and reactions drift through his mind, and then decided what to do. He took out his copy of the *Antiquarians' Cable Code* and coded a cable which read:

> "Larraby, Quinns, London. First obtain and send airmail to Aden copies of photographs of James (Jimmy) Harding, Naomi Ransom, Pearl Toji stop check and send details war record and post-war record Colonel Akbar Kassim of Port Said stop ditto of Colonel (possibly military rank during war) Michael (Mick) Thomas now on board stop also advise if any trace of James Harding since his disappearance. Radio telegraph replies to ship. Mannering."

He went up to the wireless officer, who was on duty but not busy.

"I'll get this off at once, Mr. Mannering."

"Thanks," Mannering said. "Let me have the reply whatever time of day or night it comes, will you?"

"Even if it means waking you?"

"Yes, please."

"Right, sir! Are you going ashore again?"

"I thought we were sailing tonight."

"There's been another delay, sir – something gone wrong in the Canal. We'll be here until tomorrow noon, now."

Mannering's heart dropped; and he could imagine that Captain Cross's had dropped even further.

He did not go ashore again, but many did.

At a quarter to eleven next morning the last stragglers were hurrying from the shore and the cries of the salesmen became more strident and insistent.

Mannering saw Naomi Ransom coming with two men – Mehta the Indian and Corrison the Australian. They were all laughing, as if they had no care in the world.

Naomi looked up, saw Mannering at the rail, and waved.

Then Mannering saw a youth sidling up towards the trio, carrying bouquets of roses. But instead of having his free hand outstretched for money, it was inside his ragged shirt.

"Naomi!" Mannering bellowed. "Naomi – the rose-seller!"

All three of them started. Corrison was the quickest to move, and he grabbed the boy by the shoulder and pushed him away.

A knife clattered to the ground, and the youth wriggled free and raced away.

Chapter Fifteen

REPLY

Two or three people on deck noticed the incident but most had been too busy with their last-minute bargaining, or too fascinated by the shouting boatmen and the riotous colours of their wares. The youth disappeared among the little boating sheds lining the quay. Corrison started after him and stopped suddenly when he realised the hopelessness of pursuit. Mehta had his right hand on Naomi's arm.

All three came hurrying. None of the ship's officers appeared to have noticed what had happened. Two passengers strolled towards Mannering.

"These chaps won't stop badgering you, will they?"

"It's time it was stopped."

"Well," said a third, "you've got to admit the waterfront looks a lot cleaner than it did in our time."

"Oh, they give it a shine on top."

Corrison, Naomi, and Mehta reached the deck, and came towards Mannering. He drew back to a spot where no one was within earshot. Corrison began to speak first.

"I say we ought to report that, Mannering, but Naomi doesn't want to kick up a fuss."

"Also, it would delay the ship even further," said Mehta. He was more sallow than dark-skinned, and good-looking; his complexion was flawless and he had fine dark eyes. "No one was injured, after all."

"I still say we ought to report it," Corrison insisted.

Naomi said: "John, how am I going to thank you?"

"I could see the devil was up to no good, but I doubt whether we'd ever prove it." Mannering smiled at Corrison. "It would delay us at least another twelve hours – until the noon convoy through the Canal."

Corrison scowled: "I hadn't thought of that."

"I tell you, perhaps it was an accident," Mehta temporised.

"Accident!" snorted Corrison. "That was an attempt at cold-blooded murder."

"Charles, please keep your voice down," Naomi pleaded.

"A spade's a spade in any language."

"It will do no good to make trouble. I am very anxious to arrive at Mombasa in good time. I am sure others are, also," Mehta added hastily.

"What do you say, Mannering?" Corrison was almost truculent.

"I think we'd find it impossible to prove anything, and we'd better keep quiet."

"You're as tame as the others," growled Corrison disgustedly.

But he gave way.

At last the *East Africa Star* sailed at the head of the passenger ships in a convoy of nineteen vessels, all steaming slowly, majestically through the desert, past hordes of men labouring to widen the Canal, shifting sand in baskets as they had in the days of Egypt's earlier greatness. The sun glared on the pale sand and reflected a dazzling light. After a while watching the sides of the Canal slide by and reminding himself of the days when he had been here before, Mannering went down to his cabin. A note was on the mat, slipped under the door. He picked it up, feeling a new tension. Could this be another threat?

> *Captain Cross requests the company of Mr. J. Mannering at cocktails in his cabin at 6.50.*

Mannering laughed, but there was an edge to the laughter. Until this case was over he would read threats in the most simple things, would see the most commonplace action as sinister.

He punched pillows into position and sat on his bed. It was hot and humid, and perspiration beaded his upper lip and his chin. He rang for a whisky and soda.

"With some ice, sir? American way."

"Please."

"Yes, sir."

It was a long, weak drink, but just what he wanted. He lit a cigarette and sat and pondered, going through everything that had happened in his mind for the hundredth time. The most remarkable fact was Kassim's change of heart – or at least his change of mind.

Mannering kept seeing a picture of Pearl in his mind's eye, and remembering her look of virginal purity, as she 'slept'. There had been Kassim's threats, made more hideous by the presence of the girl. Mannering had taken a chance, and Kassim had caved in.

Had he been warned that Thomas and the others were near?

Thomas had known a lot about Port Said and Kassim. Now that he had time to think, Mannering saw clearly how eager Thomas had been to help. He had made it difficult for Mannering to refuse. How far could he be trusted? What was he really after?

"Thomas," mused Mannering.

Or Naomi?

He heard the bell for luncheon; it was one o'clock. He got off the bed and went along to Pearl's cabin. The stewardess was in the one next door.

"How is Miss Toji?"

"Still asleep, sir." She had come round but had been given sedation by the ship's doctor.

"Has the doctor seen her again?"

"Oh, yes. He says she will wake up sometime this afternoon."

"Thank you," Mannering said. He waited until the stewardess had gone,

then slipped into Pearl's room. He saw her lying in a bikini swimsuit a pale lemon-colour, and against it her skin showed as beautiful as a yellow peach. She was on her back, and her breathing was shallow but even. He raised her right arm and examined it, looking for a puncture from a hypodermic needle; he found none. He tried her left arm with the same result. Very carefully he studied her legs, easing her gently over on her side to make sure he missed no tiny red mark.

There was none; except for two small moles, her skin was without blemish.

If she had been given the needle, the puncture would surely have shown.

So – how had she taken the drug? Orally, presumably, but when? It was one thing to jab a needle into someone who was not expecting it, quite another to force anyone to take tablets.

Mannering, now very puzzled, went out.

He went along to Thomas's cabin. Thomas would be at lunch. If he, Mannering, didn't hurry, he would be missed. He opened the door, which wasn't locked. It did not open wide but banged against something – probably the end of the bed. But years of taking care and of being prepared for danger made him look behind the door.

Naomi Ransom stood there.

Mannering went further into the room after closing the door, smiled at Naomi wryly, and remembered how positively Kassim had implicated her.

"Hallo," he said. "Paying a social call?"

"Just like you," retorted Naomi. For a moment she had looked alarmed, but her poise seldom deserted her for long. "Looking for something?"

"Just a little trifle," Mannering said. "And you?"

"Doing my job."

"What job?"

"John, dear, your memory can't be as bad as all that. You hired me to find out all I could about Major Thomas. I'm finding out."

Mannering said slowly: "You're good, Naomi, you're very good. What have you found?"

"Nothing of interest yet."

"What did you expect to find?"

"That Major Thomas isn't exactly what he seems."

"Ah," Mannering. "Is Naomi Ransom?"

Naomi laughed.

Mannering was keenly aware of that sense of attraction. Whether she was good or bad, he liked her. She had nearly been knifed, certainly had been within an ace of serious injury, but she had taken it in her stride. Now she was completely self-possessed. Was his feeling simply admiration for her?

"Of course I'm not what I seem," she said. "I'm Mata Hari in modern dress. Didn't you guess?"

"I guessed. Why were you attacked?"

"Someone doesn't like me."

"Colonel Kassim?"

She said: “Probably.” Her eyes narrowed as if the remark made her very wary. “Do you know him?”

“He knows you. He told me that you passed on all the instructions to kill me.”

“Oh,” said Naomi, very softly. “Did you believe him?”

“I haven’t yet seen any reason not to.”

“Come, John. Use your head.” She moved away and sat on the dressing-table stool. He could see her head and shoulders reflected in the mirror, as well as her face as she looked up at him. “Would I kill the goose which lays my golden eggs?”

“That might depend on whether someone bribed you with bigger eggs.”

“I see what you mean. I did not give Kassim any messages of any kind.”

“Yet you know him.”

“I was in Cairo during the last days of the war.”

“Doing what?”

“Saving the souls of *Wrens, Waafs,* and *Naafis,*” Naomi said.

“How?”

“You do like your t’s crossed and your i’s dotted, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

“I was in Intelligence, and my particular job was to try to make sure that our girls didn’t fall victims to drugs and didn’t risk becoming involved with Egyptian night clubs. Kassim offered very high bribes to some of our girls. They make the best strip-teasers and bed pals.”

If this story were true it could be checked.

“And you, the soul of purity and probity, rescued them,” Mannering said.

“John, dear,” retorted Naomi, “that wasn’t worthy of you. I can’t do more than tell you the simple truth.”

“Let’s try to keep that up. How many cabins have you searched on board?”

She calculated for a moment and then said calmly: “Fourteen.”

“*What!*”

“Fourteen,” Naomi repeated. “Including yours.”

“And who else’s?”

“Pearl Toji’s, Mehta’s, Corrison’s, Nares’, O’Keefe’s, young Joslyn’s—” Naomi listed all of the people on Captain Cross’s list, and some others. “Satisfied?” she asked.

“No,” he said. “What were you looking for?”

“Packets like you had in your drawer this morning.”

“Hashish?”

“Yes – or anything to suggest that anyone on board might be carrying hashish. Did you know that drug-running was now an occupation way ahead of gun-running?”

“I read it somewhere but didn’t believe it,” Mannering said.

“You should have believed it; it’s true. One of the chief drug-runners in the Middle East is Colonel Akbar Kassim. He knows I’m trying to prove it. If he could silence me by killing me or getting me involved in your problems it

would help him a great deal." Naomi glanced at her watch. "John, it's turned half past one. We'll be missed."

"People will probably think the worst of us," said Mannering drily. "Are you working in an official capacity?"

"I'm working like you – as a consultant. Provided I do what I'm paid for, I can do what I like with my private life."

"Such as?"

"A little blackmail," said Naomi lightly.

"That I can believe. Who do you work for?"

"I can't tell you," Naomi said. "You'll have to take my word for it, but I'll be able to satisfy you later. Meanwhile I've looked for the Mask of Sumi and the jewels at the same time as I've looked for drugs, John. Two birds with one stone. Do you still think that they're on the ship?"

Chapter Sixteen

REPLIES FROM LONDON

"So you know about the jewels," Mannering said softly. "How?"

"I read the newspapers and put two and two together. It wasn't difficult."

"No, I suppose not," Mannering agreed. "Why not tell me that you knew?"

"And spoil your fun?"

"Fun!" exclaimed Mannering. "Was it fun when the knife was nearly buried in your back?"

"No," agreed Naomi more soberly. "It isn't really my idea of fun, either."

"Did you talk to Kassim today?"

"No."

"Not even by telephone?"

"No. John, I'm sure we should get out of here. Mick might come up at any time."

"All right, let's go down to lunch." Mannering opened the door, glanced up and down the passage, saw no one and stepped out with Naomi on his heels. She closed the door. "Naomi."

"Yes?"

"Did you find anything in Thomas's cabin?"

"No."

"Why did you suspect him?"

Naomi laughed.

"When you know as much about Mick Thomas as I do you suspect him of everything from gun-running to smuggling, piracy to highway robbery. I'm exaggerating," she added in that half flippant, half mocking way of hers. "But Mick is one on his own. Any tricky job, even if it isn't strictly honest, and he's ready for it. He's one of the last of the great adventurers. A kind of Drake to Kassim's Long John Silver."

"Do you know if Kassim deals in jewels?" asked Mannering.

"He is supposed to be very knowledgeable about them," answered Naomi. "He's reputed to have rifled some of the ancient Egyptian tombs and sold the jewels found there at fabulous prices."

"Oh, is he," said Mannering. After a moment he asked: "Why search Thomas's cabin today?"

"I knew he'd been to Kassim's house and he might have brought something on board with him."

"Did you see him at Kassim's house?"

"I've got a lot of informants in Port Said," said Naomi.

The door of the dining-room was opened for them by the head waiter.

"I'm so sorry we're late," Mannering said. "Do you think we could have a table together?"

“Yes, Mr. Mannering, of course. Mr. Carter and his family have finished, I can have that table laid for you.” The table was in a corner. A dozen people waved, grinned, winked, or leered as Mannering led Naomi to it.

“Thanks,” Mannering said. “Just right.”

“Have you found anything on the ship at all?” Mannering asked when the waiter had taken their order.

“Yes,” Naomi said.

“Where?”

“In your cabin.”

“I know about that lot.”

Naomi leaned across and smiled at him; she was undoubtedly quite lovely and as certainly she was clever and shrewd. “What I don’t know is whether the hashish was really planted on you or whether you had it with you knowingly. After all, you went to see Kassim, you spent a long time with him and he drove you back in his Cadillac. You can’t deny that that’s V.I.P. treatment, can you?”

After a pause, Mannering said: “And are you going to use that against me, as well as my visit to O’Keefe?”

“If necessary,” said Naomi brightly. “After all, I found you in O’Keefe’s cabin and you bribed me to say nothing. You must have a guilty conscience. How much is it worth for me to say nothing about the drugs, either?”

Her eyes were sparkling with good humour but there was something else, too; a hint of seriousness, an intentness which made him doubt whether she was joking.

The waiter brought two trout, nicely cooked in butter.

“I don’t think I’ll play or pay, this time,” Mannering said.

“I think you’ll have to,” said Naomi. “If you don’t I shall tell Captain Cross exactly what I know. He would radio his head office for instructions and they would have to refer to Scotland Yard. There is a lot of activity in the anti-drugs field these days, and a clearing house for information. The Yard would have to take some action. Would you like that? The great John Mannering under suspicion of trafficking.”

Naomi broke off, looking towards the door. A man came in, and as the waiters stood aside Mannering recognised O’Keefe. He stood there for a few seconds, glaring. His fists were clenched, he was red-faced as if with rage.

He caught sight of Mannering and Naomi and came striding across. Before he reached the table he demanded in a carrying voice: “You swine, you gave me away,” he said hoarsely. “They took four thousand pounds from me thanks to your bloody meddling. I’ll break your neck if you don’t give me it back.”

The dozen or so passengers still in the dining-room stared at the trio. The head waiter took two steps forward, but stopped. The waiters went about their jobs, glancing at O’Keefe as they did so. O’Keefe was now standing by Mannering’s side, one clenched fist drawn back as if he was about to attack.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Mannering said curtly. “Sit

down and stop shouting."

"Cash or your I.O.U. has got to be in my cabin in ten minutes or I'll report to Captain Cross. Understand? Ten minutes!"

"I still don't know what you're talking about," Mannering said. He did not like the glitter in O'Keefe's eyes, and pushed back his chair for greater freedom of movement. "I haven't touched your money."

"Why, you treacherous swine!" O'Keefe roared.

He swung his right fist in a powerful blow at Mannering's chin. Mannering pushed his chair back and jumped up. O'Keefe followed with another blow which Mannering couldn't avoid; it caught him on the mouth, painfully. He felt all his pent-up anger and the frustrations of the day erupt. He sent his chair flying behind him, rode another haymaker from O'Keefe and then hit his assailant savagely, one-two to the stomach followed by a jab to the jaw. O'Keefe went back into the arms of the head waiter who came rushing up. Two European stewards moved up in support.

Naomi took Mannering's arm.

"Don't lose your head, John."

He said savagely: "Did you tell O'Keefe I'd seen his money?"

"Of course I didn't!"

"How do I know you're not a born liar as well as a born blackmailer?"

"John, don't make it worse."

O'Keefe, very dazed, was dabbing at his lips, where blood trickled slowly, over his chin. More people were looking curiously, accusingly at Mannering. Mannering squeezed Naomi's arm, the spasm of rage past.

"All right," he said *sotto voce.* Then he raised his voice. "O'Keefe, what makes you think I knew about your money?"

O'Keefe muttered: "I know you did."

"*Is* there a thief on board?" a woman asked nervously.

"You can't make accusations like that without a full explanation," Mannering said.

"Mr. Mannering, this is a matter for the Captain," the head waiter put in.

"It's a matter for the whole ship – the story will be everywhere in half-an-hour. How much money is involved, O'Keefe?"

"You know."

"How *much?* Come on, let's have it."

"A lot too much to lose," O'Keefe muttered. He still seemed dazed. "You were in my cabin half-an-hour ago."

Relief began to trickle into Mannering's mind.

"I wasn't. I was with Mrs. Ransom."

"She's up to her neck in this with you," O'Keefe said in a stronger voice; there was a hard note of defiance in it, and a glitter in his eyes, as if he was feeling well enough to be aggressive again. "I had over a thousand pounds in English money in my cabin, and it's gone too."

"Did you indeed," said Mannering. "Why did you keep a thousand pounds in your cabin? Why not hand it to the Purser for safe keeping?"

"That's my business," O'Keefe caught his breath. "Mannering, I'm warning

you. I know you went down to my cabin. That's why you were late for lunch. That bitch was keeping watch in the passage." O'Keefe glared at Naomi.

"Now, sir, I must ask—" began the head waiter.

"To hell with you! You're all in Mannering's pocket."

The swing doors opened and Captain Cross strode in. Mannering noticed a metamorphosis in him as there had been once in Thomas. He took on a greater stature. The smile on his weather-bronzed face was gone, his voice was clipped and assertive – as Mannering had heard it before, although few other passengers had.

"What's going on here, Griggs?" he asked the head waiter.

"There has been an altercation, sir," began Griggs, hesitantly. Gradually he warmed to his task and told the whole story. At least forty passengers were in the dining-saloon, most of them standing near, but Cross seemed oblivious of them.

When Griggs finished, Cross said: "I see. Mr. Mannering, have you any objection to having your cabin searched for this 1,000 pounds?"

"None at all."

"Mrs. Ransom, how about you?"

"I don't relish the idea, but if it must be searched it must."

"Captain Cross," Mannering said.

"Yes?"

"Isn't it somewhat arbitrary to search these cabins simply on the unsupported word of one passenger?"

"I must do what I think best in the interests of all passengers and the ship," Cross said. "We cannot stand on the niceties of the law. Don't you want this cleared up as quickly as possible?"

"Yes."

Cross raised his voice. "In view of the large number of passengers who have witnessed this dispute and heard the accusations, I shall make a public announcement later in the day." He turned to Naomi and went on curtly: "This way, please."

Mannering followed, his heart thumping.

This might be another attempt to frame him and put him out of commission; O'Keefe's missing money might indeed be hidden in his cabin.

"We'll go to your cabin first," Cross said to him. Neither by word nor deed did the Captain hint that he was well-disposed. He talked with absolute impartiality; he would behave that way, too.

Lister and the Number 2 Purser searched Mannering's cabin as thoroughly as any police.

They found nothing.

Mannering sensed from Naomi's physical tension that she was as much on edge as he had been, knowing that the money might have been put in her cabin without her knowledge.

No sign of it was found there, either.

O'Keefe looked thunderstruck when he was told.

"You understand, Mr. O'Keefe, that this amounts to a very serious slander and that Mrs. Ransom and Mr. Mannering will have recourse to law if they wish," said Captain Cross. "I suggest that after dinner tonight, when the passengers will be gathered in the ballroom for tombola, you withdraw your accusations unreservedly."

O'Keefe muttered: "Yes, all right. I'll do that. But they must have given me away. Someone did. All that money—"

"If you work the market in currency you must take the consequences," Cross said stonily. "To use my ship in such business is intolerable. While you remain on board you will do exactly what I or my officers request."

O'Keefe didn't speak. He looked as if he was utterly shocked by what had happened.

"John," Naomi said.

"Yes, blackmailer?"

"O'Keefe thought the money would be in your cabin or mine."

"I think you're right."

"So he must have expected someone to put it there."

"Fair enough," Mannering admitted.

"It was a deliberate plot to put both of us out of action."

"I'll tell you one thing," Mannering said lightly, "we think alike about that."

They were standing by the A Deck rail as the *East Africa Star* glided through the Canal. On this side there were only earthworks and occasional signs of widening activity; on the other there were market gardens, a rich dark green, some date palms, and beyond the never-ending desert. It was late afternoon, and so hot that a faint beading of perspiration damped Naomi's upper lip and forehead. The air was stifling.

"He was absolutely sure the money would be found, so—" Naomi hesitated.

"He was absolutely sure that someone put it there."

"After it had been hidden in one cabin or the other, someone else took it out."

"We've friends aboard," Mannering said.

"I think it must have been Thomas."

"Why?"

"He's got the nerve and the ingenuity. John!"

"Yes?"

"He was in the dining-saloon when O'Keefe began to shout, but I don't remember seeing him when the Captain arrived. Do you?"

"No," admitted Mannering. "But I wasn't in a mood to notice much."

"I didn't think you were a man ever to lose his temper."

Mannering said: "I don't like hearing a woman called a bitch in public."

Naomi's hand touched his lightly.

“Not even if she is one?”

Mannering laughed, squeezed her hand, and let her go. A moment later, Thomas came breezing along the deck, looking a youthful forty although he must be nearer sixty.

“You heard the latest?” he demanded. He slid his arm round Naomi’s waist and gave her a squeeze.

“If it’s the latest dirty story from Port Said.”

“Nothing to do with a dirty story,” Thomas said. “One of the Egyptian salesmen stayed on board at Port Said. They’re hunting for him now. He’s been seen twice by members of the crew, now he’s disappeared again. Make you happy, ducky?” he asked Naomi, and squeezed her again.

The stowaway was curled up in the Indian crew’s quarters, covered by a heap of dirty linen. He had crept here after the spot had been searched. He wore a tattered shirt and a pair of patched trousers, was bare-footed, and small. His dark hair curled in tight ringlets, his eyes even in the poor light of the smelly corner seemed very bright.

He had a knife with him.

He had a mental picture carried from photographs of the man on board whom he was to kill.

Chapter Seventeen

RADIO TELEGRAMS

Mannering left Thomas and Naomi on deck and went below. It was so hot that he seemed to be walking through an oven. His eyes felt prickly and hot after staring so long at the desert.

He had no reason to doubt the truth of what Thomas had said, and every reason for anxiety. He walked along to Pearl's cabin. It seemed a long time since he had seen her awake and well. One of the Sports Committee stalwarts was sitting in a cabin opposite her door. Whatever Thomas's reputation he seemed to be doing a thoroughly good job here.

Mannering acknowledged the man, who winked.

Mannering tapped lightly on Pearl's door, wondering whether she was round yet, and what the effect of the drug would be. There was a flurry of movement and the door opened.

Pearl said: "John, I hoped it would be you."

As she stood aside, she looked a little sleepy, and had the attractiveness of a child who had just woken. Yet she had been up long enough to change her dress; she now wore a coral pink sundress which left her shoulders and arms completely bare; no one could ever look more perfectly sun-tanned.

"And I hoped you would be awake," Mannering said. "How are you?"

"I feel so absurd," she said.

"Why?"

"To allow such a thing to happen."

"How did it happen?" asked Mannering.

"I allowed myself to be distracted by a man selling some beautiful clothes," Pearl told him. "That's really all I can remember. I was examining the patterns when I felt a little scratch on my finger. *Could* that explain what followed?"

Mannering said: "It could, I suppose. The old Egyptians were as adept as the Borgias with poison rings and knock-out drops. The important thing is whether you feel all right now."

"I feel very well," she assured him. Her eyes were brighter now and she looked glowingly fit. "It is almost as if I was given some stimulant."

"Take it easy for the rest of the day," urged Mannering. "Were you coming on deck?"

"I thought I would like to see the Canal, yes."

"Come on, then." They went out, and Pearl linked her arm in Mannering's. There was something curiously trusting about the way she did it; almost as a daughter would. Mannering found himself contrasting such simplicity with the sophistication of Naomi. They stood by the ship's rail and two or three workers by the side of the Canal waved. Just ahead was a patch of dark green, and some buildings: it looked well-kept, and like a

lakeside resort. Beyond, the Canal flowed into a wide lake, where half-a-dozen ships were steaming.

"Is that what they call Bitter Lake?" Pearl asked.

"I think it's the smaller one we go through first," Mannering said. "Pearl, would you recognise the man who tried to sell you the cotton?"

"He seemed like so many others at Port Said."

"Did you speak to Kassim?"

"To whom?"

"Colonel Akbar Kassim, the man who planned your disappearance."

Pearl turned to face him.

"If I talked to him or to anyone else I simply don't remember it," she said simply. "I cannot be sure that I didn't and cannot be sure that I did. If I talked it was under the influence of the drug." She gave a strange little laugh. "I still feel under some influence – as if all my worries and anxieties have been smoothed away."

Mannering said softly: "Do you, Pearl."

She frowned: "Why do you speak like that?"

"Because some drugs create an ecstatic state of mind, which make one feel that all in the world is wonderful."

"But surely that is when you are dreaming."

"Dreaming, sleeping, or waking," Mannering said. "Aren't you anxious any more about the jewels?"

Slowly, she shook her head.

"I know I ought to be," she said, "but it no longer worries me. Nor does—anything."

"Such as avenging your father's death."

"He seemed to die so long ago."

"A week ago," Mannering said.

"A *week?* It seems an age."

Mannering said softly: "When did you first begin to feel like this, Pearl?"

"When?" she echoed.

He felt almost impatient with her.

"Exactly when?"

"A day or two ago, I think."

"Not only today?"

"Before today I am certain. John—" For the first time she seemed touched with anxiety. "What are you trying to tell me?"

"Hashish creates a dream-world," Mannering said flatly.

"John! No!"

"I want you to be very careful what you eat and drink and what cigarettes you smoke," Mannering said. "And I want you to make a careful record whenever you feel periods of extreme happiness and light-heartedness. Will you do that?"

He felt almost guilty because she looked so scared.

"Yes, of course." She clutched his hand. "John, do you know anything about the thief yet?"

“A little,” Mannering told her. “Just a little.” He shook himself free, clutched her arms near the shoulders, and said fiercely: “Don’t take any chances. Never go anywhere without someone you know you can trust!”

Pearl asked simply: “How do I know whom I can trust?”

The odd thing was that in spite of everything he had said, she did not seem really troubled; it was as if something had indeed smoothed away her fears and her anxieties.

He left her, seeing the man in the other cabin, who simply raised his right hand in salute. He was one of Thomas’s men. How trustworthy *was* Thomas? Remember Thomas’s men had been watching when Pearl had disappeared.

Young Joslyn called: “John!”

Mannering stopped on the stairs and looked round. Joslyn looked hot and damp, as if the heat worried him.

“Hallo,” Mannering said.

“We’ve been looking for you all over the place.”

Mannering felt a twinge of alarm.

“Why? Do you know?”

“The deck tennis finals, I think,” Joslyn said. “Mick is up on the boat deck. Gosh! It’s too hot to think about games. I’m going to have a shower.”

Mannering went up, was told by several people that he was being sought, and found Thomas by the swimming pool. He was burned almost black all over, and looked like a modern Tarzan.

“Ready to play?” he asked.

“Who am I due to play?”

“You’re not on the ball,” Thomas said. “Corrison. He’s up there having a warm up.”

Corrison looked in the peak of condition as if impervious to the heat. He had slightly rounded shoulders and a very deep chest. Mannering took over from a long legged girl, and a small crowd gathered. Mannering already felt too hot, but there was a slight breeze. He realised in a moment that Corrison was a “win at all costs” player, and the man bounded and jumped like a kangaroo.

Mannering began to warm up.

Soon, Lloyd called: *“First game Corrison 6-3.”*

Mannering put everything but the game out of his mind.

“*Second game Mannering, 6-4.*”

Mannering saw Pearl and Naomi perched on a hatch, watching. He thought of Pearl’s story, then of Naomi’s. When he went to retrieve the ring someone said in his ear: “There’s a cable for you, Mr. Mannering.”

That would be the reply from Larraby. He tried to thrust the thought of it out of his mind.

“*3-1 to Corrison.*”

“*1-4 to Corrison.*”

“*5-1 to Corrison.*”

What would the cable say?

Where were those jewels?

Corrison, over-eager, double faulted on his service.

"*2-5 – Corrison's favour.*"

"*5-3 – Corrison's favour.*"

Mannering felt suffocatingly hot. Even Corrison's face was scarlet with the heat.

"*4-5 – Corrison's favour.*"

Mannering had to retrieve the ring again. A young officer bent down at the same moment, and said: "Captain Cross would like to see you as soon as you've finished this game, sir."

"Thanks," Mannering said.

He could not keep the case at bay any longer. As the rubber ring flew to and fro over the net, mental pictures flashed into his mind. Of Nikko Toji – of Pearl – the chair falling at Gibraltar – of the man throwing stones.

"*Game and set to Corrison!*"

There was a round of applause, a handshake, some back slapping. Pearl and Naomi came up and commiserated. Corrison said: "We must have a drink on that, John."

"Seven o'clock, smoking-room," Mannering suggested. "I must go and have a shower now."

"You won't forget Captain Cross, sir, will you?"

"The cable is in your cabin, sir."

Mannering went down to the cabin to shower, locked the door, showered in tepid water, wrapped a towel round his middle and dabbed his face and hands dry.

He opened the cable and the *Antiquarians' Cable Code.*

He began to get the drift of Larraby's reply.

> "Australian Corrison wealthy sheep farmer reputed millionaire, no grounds for suspicion stop Indian Mehta school-teacher in Aden. Been to England on refresher course no grounds for suspicion stop Naomi Ransom once employed by UNESCO to uncover sources of drug supplies vouched for by Bristow believed also to be a freelance reporter who supplies the Globe group with stories. O'Keefe suspected currency trafficking and known to take drugs. No known association with jewels stop Akbar Kassim notorious for traffic in women possibly also jewellery has financial interests several nightclubs in Soho, Paris, New York and Milan stop All photographs airmailed to Aden stop No positive assurances Michael Thomas believed to be soldier of fortune purpose of present journey unknown he booked passage same day as Harding disappeared stop Harding (the Chelsea antique dealer) still missing some reason to believe he is aboard *East Africa Star* under different name reason to believe Harding Kassim and O'Keefe all associated in gun-running and currency smuggling immediately after war stop."

Mannering finished decoding, and read the long cable through. Soon he heard footsteps outside. There was a thump on the door.

"Hallo?"

"Mr. Mannering?"

"Yes."

"Captain Cross's compliments and will you please visit him in his cabin at once."

"Yes, all right."

"I'll wait to take you up, sir."

"Two jiffs," Mannering called.

"As soon as you can, sir, please."

Mannering's body was sticky but his mouth was bone dry in the heat of the cabin. He slipped on shorts, a shirt and sandals and went out. Lister was now waiting for him.

"Matter of some importance, eh?" Mannering said.

"Yes," said Lister.

"Know what it's about?"

"The man who stayed aboard at Port Said."

"Found him?" asked Mannering eagerly.

"No, sir. But we've had a cable from Port Said police. They believe he's after you, Mr. Mannering."

"Oh," said Mannering heavily.

The stowaway stirred.

The knife which was tucked inside his waist was warm to his skin. He wore a blue overall with a red sash, like the Indian crew. He looked like one of the crew, who had Arab blood in him. He moved away from his hiding place towards the deck. Most of the passengers were changing for dinner. A few still splashed about in the pool, a few sat drinking. The man from Port Said began to stack chairs.

He looked closely if furtively at every male passenger who passed.

Chapter Eighteen

SUSPECTS

"Sorry I'm late," Mannering said.

"I haven't any doubt you wanted to decode your cable first," said Cross drily. "Will you have a drink?"

"A whisky and soda will be just right."

Cross poured out for them both; there was no steward present. Lister had gone, too.

"Thanks," said Mannering gratefully. "What about this plot to murder me?"

Cross said: "It looks like another one."

"It isn't exactly a surprise, but what's made you think the stowaway is part of the plot?"

Cross said: "These." He turned to his desk, picked up two passport-sized photographs, and handed them to Mannering. "These were found in a hold where he's been hiding."

Mannering looked down at his own face – and at O'Keefe's.

"Both of us," he said drily.

"It looks like it." Mannering vividly remembered the ruthlessness of the attacks – and the way Naomi had been attacked, too.

"But there's no immediate danger is there?"

"What makes you say that?"

"If he commits murder now the odds are that he'll be caught before we get to Aden. That's not for three days."

Cross finished his drink.

"That's where you've slipped up," he said drily. "He'll make his attempt in the Canal. He can jump overboard, reach the bank and be safely lost in the desert in ten minutes."

Mannering caught his breath.

"Yes, of course." He felt as if the air had suddenly gone cold, although it was very hot up here in spite of fans and blowers. "When do we go out of the Canal?"

"About ten o'clock in the morning."

"So tonight's the night. Have you warned O'Keefe?"

"Yes. He's shut himself in his cabin, and intends to stay there."

"I can see his point of view."

"What's your reaction?" Cross asked as if genuinely curious.

Mannering said: "It gives me the shivers, but I think I ought to stay around. Forewarned being forearmed I ought to be able to fix the chap."

Cross said: "Another drink?" He took Mannering's glass and refilled it. "You've forgotten something else."

"What is it?"

“These people can throw knives as accurately as you can fire a revolver.”

“Ah,” Mannering said slowly. “Life is full of the joys. Any idea where he’s tucked himself away?”

“He’s probably wearing a seaman’s dress, and lurking near a place where there are always a lot of the crew,” Cross said. “There’s another possibility.”

“Yes?”

“That he’s been hidden in someone’s cabin.”

Mannering didn’t speak.

“What was in your cable?” Cross asked abruptly.

Mannering took the deciphered message out of his pocket and handed it over. Cross held it at arm’s length and then went to the desk for a pair of glasses. He read it, nodded, and said: “Thomas.”

“Surprised?”

“Very.”

“Why?”

“Doesn’t strike me as the type,” Cross said. “Not this kind of dirty game. But I’ll have his cabin searched.” He flicked the paper with his forefinger. “Satisfied about the others?”

“I’ve reservations about Naomi Ransom,” Mannering said.

“I know what you mean.” Cross re-read the cable and then took off his glasses. “Do you know this man Harding?”

“Not by sight, only by reputation.”

“Pity,” said Cross. “We won’t get the photographs until Aden, we’ve got to be damned careful until then. I’ve detailed one of my junior officers to be with Miss Toji, and I’ve two stewardesses always on duty near her cabin. She seems a little strange since Port Said.”

“So you’ve noticed it.”

“As if all her worries have been taken away.”

“You certainly don’t miss much,” Mannering said appreciatively. “Yes. What’s your guess?”

“I hate to say hashish,” said Captain Cross. He looked and sounded forthright and determined. “The effect is different on different people but the mood of the young woman certainly makes me wonder. I’ve been talking to Dr. Roughead. He agrees that the signs are indicative of heroin poisoning. Will she allow herself to be examined?”

“How would that help?”

“Roughead says he only needs a blood test to be sure.”

“I’ll fix that somehow without alarming Pearl,” promised Mannering. “The doctor only wants a smear of blood, doesn’t he?”

“That’s all. Sure you can do it?”

“I think so.”

“Good.” Cross waved his hands in dismissal. “Thanks for coming up, Mannering.”

Mannering went down to the promenade deck. A plump woman was hurrying round, holding her swim suit up above her breasts; sweat ran in rivulets deep down that cleavage.

"Oh, *there* you are!"

"I can't wait now. I—"

"But you're *needed,*" the woman wailed. "They want to get the deck quoits semi-finals finished and you've been asked to play at 9.30 in the morning."

"9.30 it is," promised Mannering.

"Thanks *ever* so," she said. "Oh, I knew there was another thing. Are you going to enter for the fancy dress competition?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Then *would* you be the M.C. for that night? Everybody would love it, and we want someone really distinguished, we really do."

"Then that rules me out," Mannering said earnestly, and was away before the woman realised what he meant. Her "Oh you *are* a one" followed him down the stairs. It should not take long to get that blood smear from Pearl, but he did not want her to know what he was doing.

He passed one of the bathrooms. A man called in a gentle voice: "Please, Misteh, is this your soap?"

He turned.

A little dark-skinned man wearing a washed-out blue shirt and faded denims rolled up to the knees was holding out a pink flannel with some white soap on it.

"No, thanks," Mannering said.

As he half-turned, out of the corners of his eyes he saw the man's other hand move. He darted to one side. The bath-boy leapt at him, knife flashing. A woman along the passage screamed: "*Eeech!*"

Mannering saw the knife pass within an inch of his stomach. He slammed his left hand down like a chopper on the dark wrist. He felt the blow jolt his hand and arm. He heard the knife fall, clattering, and the woman shout: "Help! Help!"

Men appeared – another bath-boy, one of Thomas's he-men, Corrison, two strangers to Mannering. The eel-like body of his assailant wriggled and kicked until Mannering grabbed his wrist and twisted him round, then held his arm behind him in a hammer lock.

"What the hell's going on?" demanded Corrison.

The dark-skinned assailant was back-heeling in another futile effort to free himself.

Thomas's man bent down and picked up the knife. As Mannering saw the red smear along the cutting edge, the man said grimly: "This has been used already. You all right, Mannering?"

Mannering said bleakly: "*I'm* all right. Hold him, will you?" He let the assailant go and strode along towards the next deck and O'Keefe's cabin. He banged on the door; there was no answer. In full view of a dozen people he put his shoulder to the door and exerted all his strength. The door creaked, and then gave way.

O'Keefe lay on the bed with his throat a crimson mess.

"Oh, my God!" gasped a man looking over Mannering's shoulder.

Mannering said bleakly: “We’ve got this killer but we still haven’t got the man we want most. O’Keefe wouldn’t have opened his door or his window except to someone he trusted. Do you yet know which way the murderer got in?”

Cross said: “The window.”

“We can see the marks,” said Lister. “And the door hasn’t been opened. We had a man in the passage all the time.”

“Not on the deck outside?”

Cross said: “We had no reason to think O’Keefe would open his window. He said he would bolt it and turn the holding screw. If we could find out who persuaded him to open—” He broke off and added with refreshing candour: “Damn fool thing to say.”

Lister was looking hard at Mannering.

“Have you any ideas?”

“Where was Thomas?” asked Mannering.

“He can be accounted for every minute since six o’clock when we know O’Keefe was alive. He’d been drinking in the smoke-room, and didn’t change for dinner. Stewards and passengers are positive.”

“Mrs. Ransom?”

“She was with Thomas all the time.”

Mannering said: “What are the chances of finding out who was seen near the window on the Tourist promenade deck?”

“We’ve got a list of thirty people,” Lister said. “Mostly Tourist.”

Mannering said harshly: “I wish we had those photographs here instead of at Aden.” He lit a cigarette as he went on: “Did the prisoner say anything?”

“He was paid to do this by a white man – that’s all he says.”

“Likely story,” said Cross, gruffly. “It’s what he was told to say if he was caught.”

“This possibly imaginary white man is supposed to have given him those photographs,” Lister put in. “He was an ingenious devil, keeping free as long as he did.”

“Was he sheltering in a cabin?”

“There’s nothing to suggest he was, and he’s told us all the places he hid,” answered Cross. “Mannering, you’re more used to this kind of thing than we are. Have you any ideas about it at all?”

“The certain thing is that O’Keefe wouldn’t open his window or door except to someone he trusted. The assailant’s voice wouldn’t fool him, but an English – or even a familiar – voice would. I don’t think it was from the window.”

“I tell you we’ve seen the marks,” insisted Lister.

“I mean I don’t think someone lured him to the window and killed him there,” Mannering said. “He was lying on the bed. The killer got in while he was resting and reached him without causing any alarm.” He was staring at the window in the Captain’s cabin, concentrating as he talked. “No one could leave the door unlocked – after any visitor had gone out, O’Keefe

would have locked it. But if someone he trusted came in his attention would have been distracted. His visitor could have unbolted the window and loosened the holding screws."

"Good Lord!" exclaimed Lister.

"Very ingenious," Cross said. "Probably how it happened, too. Then O'Keefe would lie down, feeling quite secure, and the stowaway would be able to lower the window and climb in. They move like shadows, these Arab boys."

"Then we're looking for someone whom O'Keefe admitted to his cabin," Lister said.

"Seems like it," agreed Cross.

"Will you have a go?" asked Mannering.

"I certainly will." Lister hurried off, and when he had gone Cross said briskly: "Thanks, Mannering. And I'm very glad you escaped. Awful voyage, though. Have you any hope at all of seeing the end of the trouble by the time we reach Aden?"

"Yes," Mannering said. "I think I know who we're after, now."

"Thomas, I suppose," Cross said gruffly. "I can restrict him to his cabin if you think that would help."

"I don't think it would at this stage," Mannering said. "We're more likely to find those jewels if the master-mind is free." He sounded flippant but there was a bleak look in his eyes. "When will you have the police on board?"

"At Aden if necessary, but strictly speaking this comes under the United Kingdom authority. If we can catch him and prove the case against him, we can probably have him taken off by the Aden police and flown back to England. Mustn't forget this man Harding who's supposed to be in Tourist," Cross added.

"If we could get those photographs earlier—" Mannering began.

"Well, we can't," said Cross.

"Are you so sure?"

Cross frowned. "Now what's on your mind?"

"They should be waiting for us at Aden now," Mannering pointed out. "But our man is bound to be aware of that and will make his plans accordingly. If we checked by radio-telephone and found the photographs there we could have them put on a ship heading towards us from Aden."

Cross said softly, "And have them transferred at sea, eh? No, don't interrupt, let me think." There was a long pause. "Yes," he said at last. "It could be done. We could send a boat across to the other ship to collect them. Both ships would lose half-an-hour but that wouldn't matter much. We'll telephone the agents first thing in the morning."

Mannering went down to his cabin, pondered, and then thrust a pin into the sleeve of his jacket. He placed it very carefully, then went up to the promenade deck. Strains of music from the dance band came along the deck. A group of young people came hurrying and laughing. An elderly couple sat reading, a few individuals sat around reading or dozing. It was ten o'clock,

Mannering went to the bar, and Thomas turned from it.

"What'll you have, John?" he asked promptly.

"Whisky and soda, please," said Mannering.

"You need something to celebrate. Damned close show you had."

"They've been closer," Mannering said drily. "Thanks. Cheers." As he was sipping his drink, others of Thomas's Committee came along.

"Come on, you two – you ought to be dancing."

Mannering went into the ballroom. A dozen couples were dancing a tango. Naomi was with Corrison, who danced extremely well. Pearl was dancing with young Joslyn, who looked thoroughly happy, but very hot. Pearl danced with a flowing grace and rhythm which attracted everyone's attention. Mannering saw the plump woman sitting on her own and went over to her. She was fanning herself, and her face shone with sweat. The band played with a vigour and an abandon which seemed out of place, almost an affront to the dead. Everyone seemed determined to defy the clinging Red Sea heat.

The music stopped, the band played the rally for a Paul Jones. When the two rings of people stopped, women inside, men outside, Mannering found Pearl opposite him.

"Hallo, John. Where have you been?"

"Detecting," Mannering said lightly.

"Must you, tonight?"

This dance was a slow foxtrot.

"Especially tonight."

She was light as a feather, and very close to him.

"I feel I want to forget it."

"Still?"

"More than ever."

"Still having pleasant dreams?"

"They're not really dreams," Pearl protested.

"I know," Mannering agreed. He swung her round, and slid his hand along the small of her back. She was quite cool.

She winced.

"Did I tread on you?" asked Mannering. "Sorry."

"No, something pricked me."

"*What?*" asked Mannering, sharply.

"I'm sure it did."

"Let's go and see," Mannering said, and led her off the floor. "What was it like?"

"A sharp pain – oh, nothing, but—"

"Like the one when you examined the clothes in Port Said."

Her eyes lit up.

"Just like that."

They were on the promenade deck where a few chairs were dotted about but no one was lounging now. Under a lamp, Mannering said: "Let me see."

She turned round. In the small of her back was the tiny scratch made by

his pin, and there was a globule of blood. He dabbed this off with the corner of his handkerchief.

"It's nothing to look at," he said. "I'm trying to think who was dancing near us at the time."

"John," Pearl said. "You're not trying to frighten me, are you?"

"I want to make sure you're alive to all the dangers," Mannering said. He squeezed her. "You're too precious to be injured, you know."

She said in a startled voice: "Precious? To *you?*"

"Very precious."

"But—your wife, Lorna?"

"She's a long way away," Mannering said deliberately. "And I have a feeling you are precious to her, too."

Pearl was leaning against him. Out in the still sea the lights of a ship showed, like an island in the darkness; above them a tiny segment of the moon lay on its back. There was no breath of air.

"This is wonderful," Pearl said. "Wonderful."

"Isn't it?"

"John."

"Yes?" he whispered.

"I think I—" she began, but stopped.

"Go on."

"No."

"Please go on." His arm was round her shoulders now.

"John, I shouldn't have started to talk like this."

"I don't yet know how you're talking."

She leaned back against him and turned her head to look into his eyes. Her flawless skin seemed to glow. The way she stood made the line of her dress stand away from her bosom, and the deep and enticing curve of her breasts was like alabaster.

"Please don't make me talk."

"You must talk," Mannering said. His hand stole a little higher, above her waist.

She said: "John, I think I am in love with you."

Chapter Nineteen

HARD FACTS

Mannering could still hear her voice, could still see her upturned face and feel the pressure of her body against his. Throughout the hot, sultry night, when no breath of air seemed to come through the open portholes, he had slept fitfully, and on each waking had found her image in his mind.

"John, I think I am in love with you."

A little crowd, happy and hilarious with drink, had come along the deck then, the men whistling at Mannering and Pearl. The spell had been broken, and neither of them made any attempt to recapture it.

A bell rang; the early call. He pressed for his morning tea, and the little Indian from Goa who never seemed to understand him brought it.

"Good morning, sahib."

"Good morning."

An hour later, shaved and showered, Mannering went along to the surgeon's quarters. Roughead's door was unlocked, but the surgery was empty. The nursing sister, small and bright-eyed, came along.

"Can I help you?"

"Can I find Dr. Roughead?"

"He'll be along in two or three minutes," the Sister said.

Mannering waited in the air-conditioned room, one of the few cool spots on board. Why were the English so reluctant to admit the merits of air conditioning? He felt blessedly cool. He kept on seeing those vivid pictures of Pearl and Naomi – and of Lorna. There was a lot in common between Lorna and Naomi. But Pearl? He remembered how horrified Lorna had been when she had realised that Pearl had boarded the ship.

The door opened.

"Hallo, Mr. Mannering," Roughead said breezily. "I thought you'd soon be along. I've examined Miss Toji's blood specimen."

"Ah," said Mannering.

"Group O, perfectly normal."

"No sign of hashish or a similar drug?"

"None at all."

"Thanks," said Mannering. "Thanks."

"It's a great relief," Roughead said.

"Ah, yes," agreed Mannering. "Very great."

He went down to breakfast. Pearl as always was having hers in her cabin.

Lister came over.

"Good morning, Mr. Mannering."

"'Morning."

"I've a list of people who could have gone to see O'Keefe."

"And whom he would have let in?"

"Possibly."

"Don't hold out on me," Mannering urged.

"Major Thomas," declared Lister. "Mrs. Ransom, Mr. John Mannering, and Miss Toji."

"Ah," said Mannering.

Lister looked at him curiously.

"Did you call on O'Keefe?"

"Only when I broke his door down."

"Not before?"

"No, but I doubt if I could prove it."

"So do I," said Lister. "The others couldn't prove they didn't go in to see O'Keefe, either. Doesn't make the situation any easier, does it?"

"No."

"There's a call due for you from Aden in fifteen minutes," Lister changed the subject abruptly. "Will you go up to the Marconi office for it?"

"Of course," said Mannering.

The Radio Officer was waiting for him when he reached the office. The inevitable squeaks and squawks were coming out of the complicated and elaborate instruments. There was a telephone by the man's side.

"Won't keep you a jiffy, Mr. Mannering."

"Thanks."

"Captain Cross would like you to go and see him after the call."

"I will."

"*Hallo.*" The Radio Officer's voice changed. "Hallo, Aden—yes, he's on the line." He motioned to the telephone, and breathed: "The agents, sir. They know what you want."

"Thanks—hallo, there."

A man said clearly: "Mr. Mannering."

"Yes."

"I understand you would like to have your correspondence opened and described to you. Is that right, sir?"

"Yes. I'm particularly interested in one large enough to contain photographs."

"And it is in order for them to be opened?"

"Yes."

"One moment, sir."

The pause seemed to go on for a long time, and then a woman said very clearly: "Hallo, darling. Ready for a shock?"

Mannering gasped: "Lorna!"

He had not dreamt that she was at Aden; the possibility had not even crossed his mind. But it was so like her. Mannering was silent for what must have seemed a long time.

"Are you there, darling?" Lorna sounded anxious.

"Shocked into silence," Mannering said at last. "It's wonderful to hear you."

"You haven't had the shock yet," said Lorna.

"From the photographs?"

"Yes."

Mannering said in a low pitched voice: "The Pearl of the picture isn't the Pearl we know, is she?"

After another long pause, Lorna said in astonishment: "So you know."

"It's been pointing that way for a long time."

"Does she know you suspect?"

"I've tried to make sure she doesn't."

"I've heard what has happened," Lorna said. "Be very careful."

"I'll be careful," Mannering said. "What I really need is luck."

He did not go straight to the Captain's cabin, but to the verandah deck behind the bridge. He stood looking out on a sea as blue as the Mediterranean and almost glassy smooth. A long way off a ship showed up against the horizon, sailing through the haze of motionless heat.

He kept seeing Lorna's face as if it were reflected in the water.

He kept seeing Pearl's.

He heard footsteps, and Cross came towards him.

"Good morning," Cross said. "You've had your call, I'm told. Has it helped?"

"It's helped a lot," Mannering said. "You won't like it."

"I'm not personally or emotionally involved," Cross pointed out.

"The woman on board who represented herself as Pearl Toji, daughter of the dead Nikko Toji, is an impostor," Mannering announced.

"Good God!" Cross looked appalled, in spite of what he had said. After a long pause he went on: "Positive?"

"Yes."

"Had you any idea?"

"Yes," Mannering said slowly. "I began to fear it in Port Said, because I didn't see how she could have been spirited away from the sightseeing crowd. It was much more likely she would go willingly. She wasn't injured at Kassim's place. She talked about a scratched finger, but knock-out drugs can't be administered so easily as that. And—she's been so careful since we left Gibraltar. It could have been the result of hashish, but it wasn't typical."

"Roughead says her blood is quite clear." Cross remarked. He still sounded shaken.

"Yes," said Mannering. "And the dutiful daughter of a Thai family couldn't behave as light-heartedly as that so soon after her father had died. Moreover, a girl from Thailand who has lived a fairly secluded life wouldn't be so expert at all the Western dances. She came, she said, on the spur of the moment. Then why did she bring a wardrobe which made her the best-dressed woman on board?" Mannering moistened his lips. "When I knew she could have visited O'Keefe before he died I was virtually certain she was involved. I think O'Keefe was killed to make sure he couldn't name her."

Cross said: "It's a dreadful thought that such a lovely creature—" he

broke off before adding wryly: “Didn’t think I was a romantic did you?”

“It doesn’t surprise me as much as all that,” Mannering said drily.

“What do you expect now?”

“A final attempt to get the jewels off the ship before we reach Aden,” Mannering said. “I can’t believe that the thieves will allow them to stay on board after that – they must know they can’t go on indefinitely.”

“I sometimes wonder whether they’ve ever been on board, or whether the empty mask was left here to fool us.”

“I doubt it.”

“Why?”

Mannering said: “They’ve tried to kill me since. They have killed O’Keefe. Kassim took the grave risk of getting on the wrong side of his Government – he’s stuck his neck right out. He wouldn’t have gone to such lengths unless he had a lot at stake. A million or so, for instance.”

“I suppose that’s logical,” Cross said.

“Pearl, Kassim, and whoever is working with them are bound to realise that the deception can’t go on forever. If they know that my wife flew to Aden they’ll realise that Pearl’s game will be up there.” He dabbed his neck with his handkerchief. “We’ve two more nights.”

“Nights?”

“I always expect trouble by night,” Mannering said. “Days and nights, if you’d rather have it that way.” He dabbed his upper lip. “I wish I could be sure who is absolutely reliable.”

“Meaning Thomas?”

“Yes,” Mannering said. “And Naomi Ransom.” He thought of the information in the cable. “We want Pearl watched wherever she goes. Her porthole must be under constant observation. If she gives or sends anything to anyone else we must be told, and must examine whatever it is.”

“We can rely on the crew,” Cross said. “I’ll have all the stewardesses warned and tell the cabin stewards. I’ll have a word with the nursing sister and the hostesses, too. I’ll make sure Miss Toji’s cabin is under observation minute by minute.”

“Second by second,” pleaded Mannering.

“All the time,” agreed Cross. “We’ll have her watched and followed so that we know everyone she speaks to, know every move she makes. Leave that to me.”

“Thanks,” said Mannering gratefully.

When he left the Captain, he was wringing wet, it was so hot and humid. He turned on to the promenade deck for a breath of the still air, and heard gusts of laughter; a foursome was busy playing deck quoits – Joslyn and the plump woman among them.

“Don’t forget your final tomorrow morning,” she called. She looked as if she was running in sweat, but was as lively as could be.

Mannering waved and smiled.

Further along by the crescent of deck space in front of the main lounge, Naomi was standing. Mannering joined her.

“There’s a following wind, and it cancels out the wind the ship’s making,” she said. She looked pale and her eyes looked glittery. “It’s unbearable, John. I’ve never been so hot.”

“They promised us coolness after Aden,” Mannering said.

“I don’t believe it will ever be cool again,” Naomi forced a smile. “If it gets any worse I’ll be really ill.”

“You ought to take it easy,” Mannering said. “Have a cold shower and—”

“Oh, don’t talk the same claptrap as the others,” Naomi said exasperatedly. “Ten minutes after a shower I’m wringing wet again.”

“I think I’d better leave you alone until after Aden,” Mannering said.

She made no comment as he went on. Was she really affected by the heat or was she being bad-tempered for some other reason to do with his problem?

Thomas, with his shirt clinging to him in great damp patches, said brightly: “Red Sea Rig tonight, John!”

“What’s that?”

“Open-necked shirt and cummerbund. Oh, and a pair of trousers!”

Mannering laughed.

A few people were dotted about the deck, hot and listless. The sea was like a sheet of oily glass. Two freighters passed, a long way off. Mannering was watching one which seemed to be listing, when he heard footsteps, and glanced round.

Pearl was approaching.

She looked the only cool person on board.

“Hallo, John,” she said. “You’ve been avoiding me.”

“Have I?”

“You know you have. I shouldn’t have told you that I was in love with you, should I?”

He smiled at her, very gently. “Shouldn’t you?”

“John,” she said, “Lorna need never know. We could have a wonderful few days after Aden. It will be cooler, and in Mombasa it should be wonderful. We could stay at the Oceanic Hotel for a few days.”

“Do you know the coastline?” Mannering asked.

“Only by reputation,” she said quickly.

“Pearl,” Mannering said.

“Yes?”

“If we’re both on the ship beyond Aden, we’ll have a wonderful time,” Mannering said. “Wait until Aden.”

“John—”

He didn’t respond again.

“John, do you think you’ll know all the answers at Aden?”

That was really what she wanted to know; and he wanted to make her feel that Aden was the end of the run for her.

“I hope to,” he said. “I really hope so.”

“I can’t wait until we’re beyond Aden,” Pearl said in a soft voice.

She turned and walked away, slim, figure so trim, and looking so

tantalisingly cool.

Chapter Twenty

S.O.S.

It was unbelievable but the heat became worse; and the air was so heavy with moisture it seemed to cling as one walked.

The lights of a ship showed not far away, the only assurance that they were not alone in a boiling ocean.

In the ballroom the band was playing, incredibly, the Gay Gordons; even more incredibly, some people were dancing the ballroom equivalent of the Highland Fling. But lying prostrate in deck chairs were dozens of passengers, some waving fans or paper in an effort to feel a momentary coolness.

Mannering went into the smoking-room. The fancy dress parade was over, he and two women had delivered their verdicts. Here, unbelievably, were two long tables of cold meats and savouries, pastries and sausage rolls. Behind the longer laden table were four men in chef's white cap and smock. Cross came bustling in from the main deck. He had a word with the four chefs, and then called to Mannering.

"Here are the men who've prepared your meals for you," he said. "Mr… ." He introduced each one.

Mannering duly shook hands and complimented them all.

"The crowd will soon be in," Cross said. "Got to keep the gaiety up, no matter what the weather is." He looked as if he would like to dig Mannering in the ribs. They moved away. "I've had all the reports on Pearl Toji or whatever her name is," he told Mannering in a whisper.

"Well?"

"Nothing suspicious of any kind. And the more I think of it, the more I feel that the chance of her doing anything this side of Aden is extremely remote."

He broke off as a young officer came up.

"Sorry to worry you, sir." The youth handed Cross a slip of paper with some handwriting on it. Cross glanced down, frowned, and then said: "I'll be along." The youngster moved off, and Cross said to Mannering: "Everything is happening on this voyage. There's a man with appendicitis on a yacht, thirty miles away from us. We're the only ship near with a doctor."

"What does that mean?" Mannering asked.

"We'll have to pick the chap up, and bring him aboard," said Cross. "That ought to make everyone forget the heat for an hour anyhow."

The *East Africa Star's* loud-speaker blared.

> "Attention all passengers, please. The ship hove to near us is the South African steam yacht, *Dabreek*. A member of her crew is desperately ill with appendicitis. We are going to bring him

aboard. The *Dabreek* will send the man over and we shall hand him aboard on the starboard side."

Every passenger on deck crowded the rails to watch. Mannering was among them, close to the rail.

The sea was like glass, and the lights of the yacht and the mast lights of the boat bringing the sick sailor were keeping very still although the boat was drawing nearer.

A woman cried: "There he is! They won't drop him, will they?"

"Better not," a man said. "The Red Sea's alive with sharks."

"Oh, Ben!"

Searchlights focused on a man trussed up in a kind of strait-jacket – a Neil Robertson stretcher which kept him quite rigid. He was strapped at the shoulders, arms, thighs, knees, and ankles. One man in khaki shirt and shorts and wearing sandals was bending over him. The boat was small but its clean lines made it very fast. One man wearing a red fez stood at the helm. In the quiet, the boat's motor was clearly audible, stuttering without a pause.

Out of the ship's side door on C Deck Dr. Roughead appeared. He called down to the kneeling man, who looked up and shouted: "He's got a million units of penicillin in him. He should be all right until he gets to Aden."

Roughead called something which Mannering did not catch. He was watching the three-man crew closely, puzzled without quite knowing why. The ship's side was crowded up here on First Class and on the Tourist deck.

Then Mannering saw a man he had seen before, but he could not place him.

The man was below, leaning over the rail. Mannering had seen him in just such a position. Here, of course; all day long people were looking over the side, whenever he glanced over he would see a head or shoulders or bare, brown arms.

The man was taking something out of his pockets. They were large discs – the red discs which were used for shuffleboard. He dropped one down towards the little motor-boat, quite casually.

On that instant, Mannering recognised him. His name was Smith and he was the mild-mannered grey-haired proprietor of the Compton Hotel – where Toji had died.

Mannering saw the shuffleboard disc drop on to a heap of rope. Everyone else was too fascinated by the drama itself to notice this. A rope was being lowered from the *East Africa Star's* side, and the man in the stretcher was being shifted so that his head was directly underneath the rope. No one talked. The only noise was the lapping of the water, the staccato beat of the motor-boat's engine as the helmsman kept her level with the *East Africa Star*.

There was a hook at the end of the dangling rope, a ring at the top of the stretcher. The man in khaki and a ship's officer in white were trying to put the hook through the loop.

A second shuffleboard disc fell.

Mannering moved and turned towards the main hall. He could see that the rescue operation was being carried out from B deck. He knew just about the right spot, but there wasn't much time.

He saw Thomas standing and talking to a passenger.

Mannering said: "Have you seen Pearl?"

"She was dancing before this sensation. Is this urgent?"

"Yes," said Mannering. "Very urgent."

Thomas drew away from the man he was talking to.

"What's on? Pearl in danger?"

"I think she could be planning to board that motor-boat."

Thomas's expression said: "You're crazy!"

"Alert your chaps, will you?" Mannering said. He moved very quickly, and almost bumped into Naomi. She stopped, dabbing at her lips with a damp looking handkerchief.

"What's the matter?"

"Have you seen Pearl?"

"Yes – five minutes ago," Naomi said. "For the first time I nearly liked her. She said it was so hot dancing, she was going for a swim."

Mannering said: "My God! Did she have her swimsuit?"

"Yes."

Mannering didn't wait for her to finish but ran along the corridors towards the stern. He reached the deck from the deserted ballroom. Two or three young couples were in the shadows, some were by the rails, but they were too far away to get a good view.

Mannering went more calmly down the steps leading to the Tourist class swimming pool. It seemed deserted. He reached the deck, and approached the side where the man was being taken aboard. He saw a solitary figure standing in the black shadow of a winch, and crept towards it.

Pearl was there.

She was in her swimsuit, leaning over the rails. Her bare legs seemed to glow. He had no doubt that it was Pearl, little doubt what she meant to do.

He crept nearer.

Young Joslyn said: "Exciting show, John, isn't it?"

Mannering saw Pearl swing round. Joslyn was standing unobserved in another shadowy spot. Pearl's face showed up vividly.

"Pearl," Mannering said. "My wife telephoned me from Aden. She's seen a photograph of Nikko's daughter. Don't try to pretend that—"

Pearl swung round. Mannering jumped towards her but Joslyn moved at the same time and got in Mannering's way. Pearl reached the rail and climbed over. Mannering freed himself but Pearl was poised on the rail.

"Pearl!" he cried.

"Stop her!" Joslyn shouted.

Pearl dived.

"My God," gasped Joslyn. "She's dived in. The sharks will get her. My God." He was appalled.

Mannering was at the rail, peering down. He saw Pearl in the water fifty

feet or so away from the motor-boat. It was pulling away now that the man on the stretcher was aboard. A powerful searchlight beam shone on the water and on Pearl as she swam. A cry rose up from hundreds of throats, a great gasp of sound.

Joslyn cried desperately: “Man overboard!”

The motor-boat, manoeuvring slowly, drew nearer Pearl. The man who had helped the sick man was standing with a boat hook stretching out. Pearl was within twenty yards of it. Mannering could see exactly what was going to happen. She would be hauled aboard and the fast boat would move away towards the parent craft. If once she disappeared she might never be caught.

He kicked off his shoes and ran as fast as he could towards the boat, climbed the rail, and dived in. As he went down he saw the motor-boat was nearer him than he had realised. For an awful moment he saw the danger of crashing into it.

He struck the water ten feet away from the motor-boat, between it and Pearl. He could not see her but could see the man with the boat hook stretching out. He made for the boat itself. It was low in the water, and should be easy to climb into. He grabbed the side, and began to haul himself up. There was a shrill cry. He saw the pilot pointing. The third man swung towards him, and Mannering saw him snatch at an oar.

Mannering tried desperately to get in. He could not see whether Pearl was aboard or not. The man close to him had the oar thrust forward. He struck the side of the boat close to Mannering’s hand, tried again, and knocked Mannering’s wrist. The pain was excruciating. Mannering snatched one hand away, knowing that he would have to drop back into the water. A word sprang to his mind, one he had heard several times tonight.

Sharks.

He felt something glide beneath him and shivered. The oar smashed again, missing him, but the next time …

He saw a man rise out of the water beside him. It was Thomas. Thomas thrust both hands on the gunwale and hoisted himself up, then began to jump up and down. The man with the oar staggered helplessly.

Then Mannering saw other men of Thomas’s Committee clambering aboard. He looked towards the stern. The man with the boat hook was pulling Pearl aboard, but at the same time was looking over his shoulder fearfully.

Thomas, now in the boat, leaned to Mannering.

“Want a hand?” he asked, and gripped Mannering’s hand. As Mannering slid up and over the side, Thomas went on: “We’ve got to board the ship they came from, John. Coming with us, or looking after Pearl?”

Mannering said: “I’ll look after Pearl.”

But he wasn’t really thinking of her; he was staring at the shuffleboard discs. There were six of them, lying close together, dropped by Mr. Smith of the Compton Hotel.

Chapter Twenty-One

HIDING PLACE

Mannering, high and dry on the *East Africa Star,* watched Pearl being led away by Lister and the nursing sister. The rest of the passengers obviously thought she was going along to the sick bay. She walked proudly, head high, but did not look right or left.

It was an hour since the "rescue".

Mannering watched as Thomas and some of his Committee men began to climb up the rope towards the side door. As each man disappeared to safety there was a ragged cheer. Mannering went along to B Deck, and met Thomas as he came up the gangway from the deck below.

The midnight heat had already dried Thomas's clothes and hair.

"All okay," he said cheerfully. "Three of my Committee've taken over the yacht – it's Egyptian, not South African. Kassim owns it. They'll get the yacht to Aden. The crew's amenable, mostly Arabs with a couple of white officers. I gather they think they've been running drugs or arms. Do you know which?"

Mannering said: "Neither, this time – I don't know what they do at others."

As he spoke an officer came up, saluted smartly, and said: "Captain Cross's compliments, gentlemen, and he would like to see you both in his cabin."

"Now we're in for the big stick," Thomas said.

In fact, Cross was relaxed and mild-mannered. He had whisky and gin handy, but no steward to wait on them.

He poured out.

"I must say, gentlemen, that you both dice very readily with death in these shark-infested waters. I presume you knew the risks?"

"There wasn't time for any risks," disclaimed Thomas. "Was there, John? As soon as I saw Pearl Toji go in and John follow I realised what was on – it was a phoney illness, and that yacht was up to no good. Strictly speaking what I did when taking it over was an act of piracy. Eh, Skipper?"

Cross laughed.

"Don't ask me to get you out of your mess," he said. "But I'm damned glad you took the law into your own hands. I wouldn't like to have decided what to do if you hadn't. It's no part of my job to get involved in that kind of caper."

"Do we know what really happened?" asked Thomas.

"So far as tonight's business is concerned, yes," answered Cross. "I've talked to the man who brought the sick member of the crew over."

"*Is* he sick?" asked Thomas.

"No. They pumped morphine into him, not penicillin. He'll be all right. It

was simply a trick to get the jewels on board the motor-boat, and to take the girl off. It nearly worked, too. What made you realise it was a fake, Mannering?"

"Call it luck," Mannering said. "I saw a man dropping shuffleboard discs into the motor-boat, and that seemed a bit odd. It dawned on me that the jewels we were looking for could be hidden in fake discs." He looked at the six which were laid out on a small table. "Are they, sir?"

"We've examined one," Cross answered. "It contained two diamonds and two emeralds, wrapped in cotton wool, packed as safely as you could want."

"What jewels are they?" Thomas demanded. "Don't try my patience too far or I'll get my Committee to take this ship over, too."

"That will be the day," said Cross. "Like to explain, Mr. Mannering?"

Mannering smiled: "He's earned it." He told the story as simply as he could. When he had finished, Thomas said almost sadly: "I could have sworn it was a drug racket."

"Never satisfied, some people," Cross remarked. "The prisoner knows the situation, Mannering. He says that Akbar Kassim has often handled stolen jewels – he's acted as a kind of half-way house between East and West. O'Keefe's always been a small-time drug trafficker working with Kassim. This time O'Keefe carried a bit of ready cash with him, as always, and then realised that Mrs. Ransom was after him. He went to Kassim for protection, and discovered that the Thai girl was working with Kassim. He tried to blackmail Kassim. We don't need any more telling why he was killed. Kassim wanted you dead, too – but on the ship at sea, not at Port Said, where he would be involved. And Pearl, whoever she is, thought you'd seen the truth about her, John – that was another reason why you were on the assassination list."

Mannering said: "I was beginning to suspect Pearl before we reached Port Said. I must have given myself away. Has she talked?"

"She won't say a word," Cross told him. "But the man who dropped those discs over the side has. He is a man named Smith, an associate of the dealer, James Harding. Harding himself was first approached by the Thai girl who called herself Pearl Toji. She had word that Nikko Toji was bringing the jewels to you, Mannering – and something else."

"What else?" demanded Mannering, tensely.

Cross said: "Care to open those discs, Mannering?"

Mannering hesitated, then stood up and went to them. He picked up one and the top half came off easily; this was the one which Cross had already opened. A diamond winked at him from its bed of cotton wool. He picked up another, felt it, tried to prise it open, and then pressed all round the edges. Suddenly there was a sharp click; after that the top of the disc came off easily.

There were rubies and emeralds there.

In two others there were jewels, too. Mannering put them all aside, acutely aware of Thomas's interest and Cross's watching eyes.

In the fifth disc there were smaller jewels and a small cylinder which

contained a roll of paper. Mannering unrolled it, and saw the wording and realised almost at once what this meant.

"It's a detailed list of directions where to find the rest of the Crown Jewels of Sumi," Mannering said, very softly. "The hiding place of two million pounds' worth of precious stones. I wish I knew just what Nikko Toji had in mind."

"You should know at Aden," Cross said. "I've just had word that his real daughter arrived there by air from Bangkok."

"I would never have believed she was a criminal," young Joslyn said miserably. "I can really believe it now."

"Why did you follow her last night?" asked Mannering.

"Somehow I had to. I always had to," Joslyn said. It was almost pathetic.

"John," said Naomi, "I wouldn't have taken your money. I threatened blackmail just to make sure you were the man of your reputation."

"Did the *Globe* ask you to take up the story after Dottie Mills?" inquired Mannering.

"Yes," said Naomi. She was cooler and much more herself. "You'll get such a build up, John."

"I'm not sure I want one," Mannering said.

Naomi laughed. "I'll let you off if you answer one question."

"What is it?"

"Who *is* the woman who called herself Pearl Toji?"

"That's what I'm going to find out," Mannering said.

Lorna was standing in the launch which approached the *East Africa Star* from Aden. It was dusk. A heat haze gathered over the volcanic hills, almost like a threat of an eruption tomorrow. Several big freighters were at anchor, and a dozen small craft and lighters moved in all directions at once, it seemed.

Lorna waved.

Mannering felt a wave of emotion such as he had not experienced for a long time. The soft light gentled Lorna and yet could not dull the eagerness in her eyes. She waved only once, then stood quite still. The launch drew alongside. Behind Lorna was a much smaller woman, obviously from the East.

Two men came up the gangway. A third helped Lorna on to the bottom of it. She stepped on the platform and started up the stairs. As she came, it dawned on Mannering that he was looking at her as if she was the only woman in the world. She wore a sleeveless, tailored dress, light green in colour, but no hat. She stepped inside the doorway on to the ship.

Mannering said huskily: "Hallo, my sweet."

"John," Lorna said. "I had to come."

"You'd have heard from me if you'd stayed away," Mannering said.

He hugged her close, and he could feel her heart thumping. Then he

forced himself to let her go and to stand back. Lorna turned as the Oriental woman came aboard.

"This is the real Pearl Toji," Lorna said.

The Thai girl was not lovely as the impostor had been, yet in her way attractive with her broad face and delicate, unblemished skin. She smiled gravely and held out her hand.

"I must thank you, Mr. Mannering, for all that you have done," she said simply. She offered him her hand.

"Miss Toji," Mannering said, "can you answer me one question before we go into details?"

"I will try."

"Is the woman who impersonated you Prince Asri's wife, Kana?"

The real Pearl Toji said: "Yes, Mr. Mannering. She wanted the jewels for their value, she did not share her husband's opinions. In one way it is good, for now he will have to divorce her. He will be able to serve his country better that way."

"I realise what else you need to know, Mr. Mannering," Pearl said. "It is really very simple. My father was asked to sell these jewels for the best possible price, for the Government of Sumi. The country needs funds so very much. My father believed you would be most likely to find the best market. But he could not bring everything with him. The risk was too great. So he brought the mask, and in one of the settings was all that you found – details of the place where all the other jewels can be found. Only my father and the Sumi Government knew. But my father told me what he was planning and where he had hidden the secret. Also, he told Princess Kana, believing he could trust her."

"So she was in at the beginning," Mannering said heavily.

"Yes, that is so. We know now that she tried to find someone else to handle the jewels – James Harding. Harding arranged for his associate to meet Toji at the airport, but it was Kassim – whom Harding had to use – who planned everything after what happened in London. Kassim – and Princess Kana."

"Did she know about the poisoning?" Mannering asked.

"I do not know. I am only sure that Kassim did. Once Kassim took control, no one else greatly mattered. But for you," she added, "I think the plot would have succeeded. For the other jewels are still in the possession of Prince Asri. He would have surrendered them to anyone who took him the jewels from the mask.

"I thank you for the memory of my father, who can rest in peace. I thank you for myself. And I thank you in the name of Prince Asri and the people of Sumi."

Mannering said to Lorna: "I don't think I've ever known anyone more touching."

"I know exactly what you mean," Lorna said.

They stood at Aden airport and saw the great aircraft take off to the East, with Pearl Toji aboard. An official of the Aden Police was with them, and as they turned away, he said: "Very satisfactory outcome for you, Mr. Mannering, and for that young woman."

"Very," Mannering said – and thought of Nikko Toji dying.

"I've sorted out the mess where the others are concerned," the police official went on. "The woman who posed as Pearl Toji and the man Smith are to fly back to England – their crimes were committed aboard the *East Africa Star*, and will be tried in England. The people from the yacht are Egyptians but I've had agreement from Egypt to try them here in Aden for piracy on the high seas. They'll get what they deserve, be sure of that. Egypt will deal with Kassim."

"I'm sure," Mannering said.

"Now, how about a little sightseeing before your plane leaves …"

"What I would like to do is talk to Captain Cross by radio-telephone," Mannering said.

"That's no trouble," the official assured him. "The *East Africa Star* will be about twelve hours out of Mombasa. Come back to my office and I'll fix it."

There were other things he had "fixed". He was able to tell Mannering that Smith had talked freely, blaming the man whom Kassim had sent – the man who had died at Gibraltar – for the poisoning. He had telephoned Lorna in the first place, when he had felt it was too late for Mannering to help. He had even gained more time by pretending that Toji had said "Mrs" not "Mister" Mannering.

Smith had sent the threatening notes on board, too – the one to Pearl to make her look a victim.

"The master of the yacht is the man who acted as Kassim's bodyguard," the police chief had said. "Kassim was terrified of serious trouble at Port Said. He hoped you would be scared off by the danger to the woman you thought was Pearl Toji. Then Thomas – damned good chap, Thomas – put the fear of Allah and Nasser into him, too."

"I don't really understand how Kassim took such an important part," Mannering said.

"He's been a kind of clearing house for anything stolen for years – arch-smuggler between East and West. He'd often worked with Jimmy Harding. Harding realised he couldn't handle this on his own, and Kassim flew an agent to London ahead of Toji. Harding committed suicide, by the way. Well! I must fix that call to the *East Africa Star*."

"Hallo, Mannering," Cross said in that familiar matter-of-fact voice. "Nice of you to call me. What's happened?"

He listened. "Well, well," he said at last. "What a story! I'm glad it ended at Aden, mind you. Had a very peaceful trip since we got rid of you. Young Joslyn's found another girlfriend. Thomas prowls around looking for trouble he knows he won't get. Not in the way he's hoping, anyhow."

"What trouble will he get?" asked Mannering.

Cross laughed.

"He and Naomi Ransom spend a lot of time together. I wouldn't be too surprised if they're serious. Nice couple. Might work out very well."

Mannering had that feeling too.

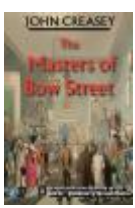
Series Information

Published or to be published by
House of Stratus

Dates given are those of first publication
Alternative titles in brackets

'The Baron' (47 titles) (writing as Anthony Morton)
'Department 'Z'' (28 titles)
'Dr. Palfrey Novels' (34 titles)
'Gideon of Scotland Yard' (22 titles)
'Inspector West' (43 titles)
'Sexton Blake' (5 titles)
'The Toff' (59 titles)

along with:



The Masters of Bow Street
This epic novel embraces the story of the Bow Street Runners and the Marine Police, forerunners of the modern police force, who were founded by novelist Henry Fielding in 1748. They were the earliest detective force operating from the courts to enforce the decisions of magistrates. John Creasey's account also gives a fascinating insight into family life of the time and the struggle between crime and justice, and ends with the establishment of the Metropolitan Police after the passing of Peel's Act in 1829.

'The Baron' Series

These Titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels

1. Meet the Baron *(The Man in the Blue Mask) (1937)*
2. The Baron Returns *(The Return of the Blue Mask) (1937)*

3. The Baron Again *(Salute Blue Mask) (1938)*
4. The Baron at Bay *(Blue Mask at Bay) (1938)*
5. Alias the Baron *(Alias Blue Mask) (1939)*
6. The Baron at Large *(Challenge Blue Mask!) (1939)*
7. Versus the Baron *(Blue Mask Strikes Again) (1940)*
8. Call for the Baron *(Blue Mask Victorious) (1940)*
9. The Baron Comes Back *(1943)*
10. A Case for the Baron *(1945)*
11. Reward for the Baron *(1945)*
12. Career for the Baron *(1946)*
13. Blood Diamond *(The Baron and the Beggar) (1947)*
14. Blame the Baron *(1948)*
15. A Rope for the Baron *(1948)*
16. Books for the Baron *(1949)*
17. Cry for the Baron *(1950)*
18. Trap the Baron *(1950)*
19. Attack the Baron *(1951)*
20. Shadow the Baron *(1951)*
21. Warn the Baron *(1952)*
22. The Baron Goes East *(1953)*
23. The Baron in France *(1953)*
24. Danger for the Baron *(1953)*
25. The Baron Goes Fast *(1954)*
26. Nest-Egg for the Baron *(Deaf, Dumb and Blonde) (1954)*
27. Help from the Baron *(1955)*
28. Hide the Baron *(1956)*
29. The Double Frame *(Frame the Baron) (1957)*
30. Blood Red *(Red Eye for the Baron) (1958)*
31. If Anything Happens to Hester *(Black for the Baron) (1959)*
32. Salute for the Baron *(1960)*
33. The Baron Branches Out *(A Branch for the Baron) (1961)*
34. The Baron and the Stolen Legacy *(Bad for the Baron) (1962)*
35. A Sword for the Baron *(The Baron and the Mogul Swords) (1963)*
36. The Baron on Board *(The Mask of Sumi) (1964)*
37. The Baron and the Chinese Puzzle *(1964)*
38. Sport for the Baron *(1966)*
39. Affair for the Baron *(1967)*
40. The Baron and the Missing Old Masters *(1968)*
41. The Baron and the Unfinished Portrait *(1969)*
42. Last Laugh for the Baron *(1970)*
43. The Baron Goes A-Buying *(1971)*
44. The Baron and the Arrogant Artist *(1972)*
45. Burgle the Baron *(1973)*
46. The Baron - King Maker *(1975)*
47. Love for the Baron *(1979)*

'Department Z' Novels

These Titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels

1. The Death Miser *(1932)*
2. Redhead *(1934)*
3. First Came a Murder *(1934)*
4. Death Round the Corner *(1935)*
5. The Mark of the Crescent *(1935)*
6. Thunder in Europe *(1936)*
7. The Terror Trap *(1936)*
8. Carriers of Death *(1937)*
9. Days of Danger *(1937)*
10. Death Stands By *(1938)*
11. Menace! *(1938)*
12. Murder Must Wait *(1939)*
13. Panic! *(1939)*
14. Death by Night *(1940)*
15. The Island of Peril *(1940)*
16. Sabotage *(1941)*
17. Go Away Death *(1941)*
18. The Day of Disaster *(1942)*
19. Prepare for Action *(1942)*
20. No Darker Crime *(1943)*
21. Dark Peril *(1944)*
22. The Peril Ahead *(1946)*
23. The League of Dark Men *(1947)*
24. The Department of Death *(1949)*
25. The Enemy Within *(1950)*
26. Dead or Alive *(1951)*
27. A Kind of Prisoner *(1954)*
28. The Black Spiders *(1957)*

Doctor Palfrey Novels

These Titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels

1. Traitor's Doom *(1942)*
2. The Legion of the Lost *(1943)*
3. The Valley of Fear *(The Perilous Country) (1943)*
4. Dangerous Quest *(1944)*
5. Death in the Rising Sun *(1945)*

6. The Hounds of Vengeance *(1945)*
7. Shadow of Doom *(1946)*
8. The House of the Bears *(1946)*
9. Dark Harvest *(1947)*
10. The Wings of Peace *(1948)*
11. The Sons of Satan *(1948)*
12. The Dawn of Darkness *(1949)*
13. The League of Light *(1949)*
14. The Man Who Shook the World *(1950)*
15. The Prophet of Fire *(1951)*
16. The Children of Hate *(The Killers of Innocence; The Children of Despair) (1952)*
17. The Touch of Death *(1954)*
18. The Mists of Fear *(1955)*
19. The Flood *(1956)*
20. The Plague of Silence *(1958)*
21. Dry Spell *(The Drought) (1959)*
22. The Terror *(1962)*
23. The Depths *(1963)*
24. The Sleep *(1964)*
25. The Inferno *(1965)*
26. The Famine *(1967)*
27. The Blight *(1968)*
28. The Oasis *(1970)*
29. The Smog *(1970)*
30. The Unbegotten *(1971)*
31. The Insulators *(1972)*
32. The Voiceless Ones *(1973)*
33. The Thunder-Maker *(1976)*
34. The Whirlwind *(1979)*

Gideon Series

(Writing as JJ Marric)

These Titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels

1. Gideon's Day *(Gideon of Scotland Yard) (1955)*
2. Seven Days to Death *(Gideon's Week) (1956)*
3. Gideon's Night *(1957)*
4. A Backwards Jump *(Gideon's Month) (1958)*
5. Thugs and Economies *(Gideon's Staff) (1959)*
6. Gideon Combats Influence *(Gideon's Risk) (1960)*
7. Gideon's Fire *(1961)*

8. A Conference for Assassins *(Gideon's March) (1962)*
9. Travelling Crimes *(Gideon's Ride) (1963)*
10. An Uncivilised Election *(Gideon's Vote) (1964)*
11. Criminal Imports *(Gideon's Lot) (1965)*
12. To Nail a Serial Killer *(Gideon's Badge) (1966)*
13. From Murder to a Cathedral *(Gideon's Wrath) (1967)*
14. Gideon's River *(1968)*
15. Darkness and Confusion *(Gideon's Power) (1969)*
16. Sport, Heat & Scotland Yard *(Gideon's Sport) (1970)*
17. Gideon's Art *(1971)*
18. No Relaxation at Scotland Yard *(Gideon's Men) (1972)*
19. Impartiality Against the Mob *(Gideon's Press) (1973)*
20. Not Hidden by the Fog *(Gideon's Fog) (1975)*
21. Good and Justice *(Gideon's Drive) (1976)*
22. Vigilantes & Biscuits *(Gideon's Force) (1978)*

Inspector West Series

These Titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels

1. Inspector West Takes Charge *(1942)*
2. Go Away to Murder *(Inspector West Leaves Town) (1943)*
3. An Apostle of Gloom *(Inspector West At Home) (1944)*
4. Inspector West Regrets *(1945)*
5. Holiday for Inspector West *(1946)*
6. Battle for Inspector West *(1948)*
7. The Case Against Paul Raeburn *(Triumph for Inspector West) (1948)*
8. Inspector West Kicks Off *(Sport for Inspector West) (1949)*
9. Inspector West Alone *(1950)*
10. Inspector West Cries Wolf *(The Creepers) (1950)*
11. The Figure in the Dusk *(A Case for Inspector West) (1951)*
12. The Dissemblers *(Puzzle for Inspector West) (1951)*
13. The Case of the Acid Throwers *(The Blind Spot; Inspector West at Bay) (1952)*
14. Give a Man a Gun *(A Gun for Inspector West) (1953)*
15. Send Inspector West *(1953)*
16. So Young, So Cold, So Fair *(A Beauty for Inspector West; The Beauty Queen Killer) (1954)*
17. Murder Makes Haste *(Inspector West Makes Haste; The Gelignite Gang; Night of the Watchman) (1955)*
18. Murder: One, Two, Three *(Two for Inspector West) (1955)*
19. Death of a Postman *(Parcels for Inspector West) (1956)*
20. Death of an Assassin *(A Prince for Inspector West) (1956)*
21. Hit and Run *(Accident for Inspector West) (1957)*

22. The Trouble at Saxby's *(Find Inspector West; Doorway to Death) (1957)*
23. Murder, London - New York *(1958)*
24. Strike for Death *(The Killing Strike) (1958)*
25. Death of a Racehorse *(1959)*
26. The Case of the Innocent Victims *(1959)*
27. Murder on the Line *(1960)*
28. Death in Cold Print *(1961)*
29. The Scene of the Crime *(1961)*
30. Policeman's Dread *(1962)*
31. Hang the Little Man *(1963)*
32. Look Three Ways at Murder *(1964)*
33. Murder, London - Australia *(1965)*
34. Murder, London - South Africa *(1966)*
35. The Executioners *(1967)*
36. So Young to Burn *(1968)*
37. Murder, London - Miami *(1969)*
38. A Part for a Policeman *(1970)*
39. Alibi for Inspector West *(1971)*
40. A Splinter of Glass *(1972)*
41. The Theft of Magna Carta *(1973)*
42. The Extortioners *(1974)*
43. A Sharp Rise in Crime *(1978)*

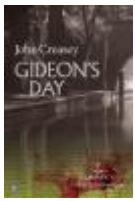
'The Toff' Series

These Titles can be read as a series, or randomly as standalone novels

1. Introducing the Toff *(It's the Toff!) (1938)*
2. The Toff Goes On *(1939)*
3. The Toff Steps Out *(1939)*
4. Here Comes the Toff *(1940)*
5. The Toff Breaks In *(1940)*
6. Salute the Toff *(1941)*
7. The Toff Proceeds *(1941)*
8. The Toff Goes to Market *(1942)*
9. The Toff Is Back *(1942)*
10. The Toff on the Trail *(short stories) (1942)*
11. The Toff among the Millions *(1943)*
12. Accuse the Toff *(1943)*
13. The Toff and the Deadly Priest *(The Toff and the Curate) (1944)*
14. The Toff and the Great Illusion *(1944)*
15. Feathers for the Toff *(1945)*
16. The Toff and the Lady *(1946)*

17. Poison for the Toff *(The Toff on Ice) (1946)*
18. Hammer the Toff *(1947)*
19. The Toff in Town *(1948)*
20. The Toff Takes Shares *(1948)*
21. The Toff and Old Harry *(1949)*
22. The Toff on Board *(1949)*
23. Fool the Toff *(1950)*
24. Kill the Toff *(1950)*
25. A Knife for the Toff *(1951)*
26. A Mask for the Toff *(The Toff Goes Gay) (1951)*
27. Hunt the Toff *(1952)*
28. Call the Toff *(1953)*
29. The Toff Down Under *(Break the Toff) (1953)*
30. Murder Out of the Past *(short stories) (1953)*
31. The Toff at Camp *(The Toff at Butlins) (1954)*
32. The Toff at the Fair *(1954)*
33. A Six for the Toff *(A Score for the Toff) (1955)*
34. The Toff and the Deep Blue Sea *(1955)*
35. Kiss the Toff *(Make-Up for the Toff) (1956)*
36. The Toff in New York *(1956)*
37. Model for the Toff *(1957)*
38. The Toff on Fire *(1957)*
39. The Toff and the Stolen Tresses *(1958)*
40. Terror for the Toff *(The Toff on the Farm) (1958)*
41. Double for the Toff *(1959)*
42. The Toff and the Runaway Bride *(1959)*
43. A Rocket for the Toff *(1960)*
44. The Toff and the Kidnapped *(The Kidnapped Child) (1960)*
45. Follow the Toff *(1961)*
46. The Toff and the Toughs *(The Toff and the Teds) (1961)*
47. A Doll for the Toff *(1963)*
48. Leave It to the Toff *(1963)*
49. The Toff and the Spider *(1965)*
50. The Toff in Wax *(1966)*
51. A Bundle for the Toff *(1967)*
52. Stars for the Toff *(1968)*
53. The Toff and the Golden Boy *(1969)*
54. The Toff and the Fallen Angels *(1970)*
55. Vote for the Toff *(1971)*
56. The Toff and the Trip-Trip-Triplets *(1972)*
57. The Toff and the Terrified Taxman *(1973)*
58. The Toff and the Sleepy Cowboy *(1975)*
59. The Toff and the Crooked Copper *(1977)*

Select Synopses

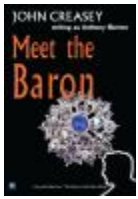


Gideon's Day
Gideon's day is a busy one. He balances family commitments with solving a series of seemingly unrelated crimes from which a plot nonetheless evolves and a mystery is solved. One of the most senior officers within Scotland Yard, George Gideon's crime solving abilities are in the finest traditions of London's world famous police headquarters. His analytical brain and sense of fairness is respected by colleagues and villains alike.

Gideon's Night
On this particular night Commander George Gideon has to deal with a couple of psychopaths who trail pain and blood in their wake. One targets infants, and the other young women on London's foggy streets. There's also an explosive gang war in the offing, and one way or another all of these cases are coming to their breathtaking conclusions at the same time. Can Scotland Yard's finest cope with such a nightmarish scenario, with what would ordinarily be months of time consuming police work crammed into just one night?

Gideon's Fire
Commander George Gideon of Scotland Yard has to deal successively with news of a mass murderer, a depraved maniac, and the deaths of a family in an arson attack on an old building south of the river. This leaves little time for the crisis developing at home . . .

Meet the Baron
John Mannering (*The Baron*) makes

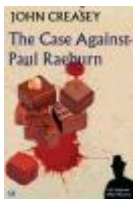


his first appearance in this volume. Lord Fauntley cannot help showing off both his daughter and the security under which his precious jewels are kept. Mannering finds himself attracted to both .... Money is tight and so he plans a burglary, but this fails and unexpected consequnces result. The relationship with Lorna Fauntley flourishes, and a series of high profile thefts and adventures ensure Mannering's future, so he believes, until Lorna equates him with *The Baron*. One of the many further twists in this award winning novel occurs when the police appear to seek Mannering's help, only to have everything turned upside down as the plot develops . . .

Shadow The Baron
John Mannering ('*The Baron*') is called in by Scorland Yard's Superintendent Bristow to help catch the mysterious jewel thief '*The Shadow*'. No one know the thief's identity, but he has managed to pull off many high profile robberies. However, as Mannering proceeds to track down the target, he finds the pursuer becomes the pursued . . . ..

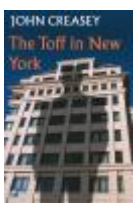
The House of the Bears
Standing alone in the bleak Yorkshire Moors is Sir Rufus Marne's *'House of the Bears'*. Dr. Palfrey is asked to journey there to examine an invalid - whom he finds has disappeared. Moreover, Marne's daughter lies terribly injured after a fall from the minstrel's gallery, which Dr. Palfrey discovers was no accident. He sets out to look into both matters, but the discoveries he makes are truly fantastic. A deserted mine, powerful explosive and a submarine all feature in this powerful mystery. The results are even capable of surprising him ...

Inspector West Takes Charge
Extortion is the name of the game, as one victim after another is ruthlessly targeted. Chief Inspector Roger West must now solve the problem, along with a tangle of murders - but the case becomes more frightening as every minute passes.



The Case Against Paul Raeburn
Chief Inspector Roger West has been watching and waiting for over two years - he is determined to catch Paul Raeburn out. The millionaire racketeer may have made a mistake, following the killing of a small time crook. Can the ace detective triumph over the evil Raeburn in what are very difficult circumstances? This cannot be assumed as not eveything, it would seem, is as simple as it first appears .....

Introducing The Toff
The Toff is the Hon. Richard Rollison; the ultimate sleuth who revels in solving crimes. Whilst returning home across the Essex countryside from a day's cricket at his father's Norfolk home, he happens upon an accident that sets him on a new trail. This involves murder, suspense and thrilling action as The Toff applies his mind with its usual precision and thoroughness.



The Toff in New York
'Say, Miss Hall, I hope that brother of yours hasn't run into any trouble.' But Will Hall had been kidnapped and the Honourable Richard Rollison, known by many by the apt if absurd soubriquet of the *'Toff'* is soon on the scene, but not before a murdered man had fallen into Valerie Hallís arms. There's lots of action in 'millionaire surroundings', with a rich private eye

and the NYPD all on the case, whilst the Toff tracks Dutch Himmy, surely the worst man in New York . . . ..

www.houseofstratus.com